

DGuzik 16 Nehemiah

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These are the words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: It so happened that in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year, I was in Susa the citadel.

Guzik - Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah 1 - Nehemiah's Prayer

A. Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's crisis condition.

1. Some 1,000 years after the time of Moses and some 400 years before the birth of Jesus, the nation of Israel and the Jewish people were in a desperate state.

a. Their nations were destroyed, First the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel and then the southern Jewish kingdom of Judah. The city of Jerusalem was completely conquered by the Babylonians and the once-glorious temple of Solomon was destroyed.

b. When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they deported almost everyone from the city and the region - for some 70 years, Jerusalem was a ghost town, with the potential to end up like many ancient cities - completely forgotten except to history.

c. When the Jews were deported to Babylon, they began to make homes for themselves there. They settled down, and many still followed the God of their Fathers, but they did it from Babylon, with no desire to return to the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

i. Some of these faithful Jews were raised up to places of prominence in the governments they were deported to. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego became leaders in Babylon; Esther was made queen in the courts of a Persian king.

d. But after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, they were given the opportunity to return to their homeland, the Promised Land. Out of the some two or three million Jews deported from the land, only 50,000 decided to return to the Promised Land. That's only something like 2%!

But they did return, and in the days of Ezra, they rebuilt the temple and laid a spiritual foundation for Israel once again.

e. The Book of Nehemiah begins 15 years after the Book of Ezra ends; almost 100 years after the first captives came back to the Promised Land; and some 150 years after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. After this long time, the walls of the city of Jerusalem were still in rubble.

i. Before this, citizens of Jerusalem had tried to rebuild the walls but had failed. In Ezzr.

4:6-23, we see that some 75 years before they tried to rebuild the walls, but were stopped by their enemies. No one thought this obstacle could be overcome, so the walls lay in ruin and the people stayed in trouble.

2. (1-3) Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's condition.

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates *are burned* with fire."

a. **In Shushan the citadel:** Nehemiah lived in **Shushan**, the capital city of the Persians, and he lived in the **citadel** - that is, the fortified palace of the Persians. Right away, we know Nehemiah is someone important, living in the palace of the king of Persia.

b. **I asked them concerning the Jews who**

had escaped, who had survived the

captivity, and concerning Jerusalem: Nehemiah's body was in Persia but his heart and his interest were in Jerusalem - 800 miles away. He wanted to know from those returning how the people and the city were doing.

i. We might think that an important man like Nehemiah had more important things to

think about than a distant city he had never been to, and a people he had mostly never

met. Yet, because his heart was for the

things of God, his heart was not on himself, but on others.

ii. Nehemiah had the heart of Psa. 137:5-6: *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth; if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.* If Jerusalem was special to God, then it was also special to Nehemiah.

c. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken

down, and its gates are burned with fire: The news he received was not encouraging. The people were called **survivors**; this was not a hopeful title. They were in **great distress and reproach**, and the walls of the city itself were **broken down** and the city **gates are burned with fire**.

i. The bad state of the people and the bad state of the city walls were intimately connected. In the ancient world, a city without walls was a city completely open and vulnerable to its enemies. They had no defense, no protection at all.

ii. An *unwalled city* was always a backwater town, with nothing valuable in it. If there were anything of value in an unwalled city, it could be stolen away easily because there was no defense to stop it.

iii. Those living in an unwalled city lived in constant stress and tension; they never knew when they might be attacked and

brutalized. Every man lived in constant fear for his wife and children. The temple could be rebuilt, but never made beautiful, because anything valuable would be taken easily.

iv. No wonder the people lived in constant **distress**, in constant disgrace (**reproach**), living only as **survivors**. God has more for us than to be mere survivors. God not only wants us to be conquerors, but *more than conquerors through Him who loved us* (Rom. 8:37).

3. (4) Nehemiah's reaction to the news about Jerusalem and its people.

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *for many days*; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

a. **I sat down and wept**: Nehemiah's immediate reaction was extreme. He didn't just feel bad for Jerusalem and its people; right away, there was no strength in his legs (**I sat down**), and he began to weep and to mourn.

b. **Mourned for many days**: God was going to use Nehemiah to *do* something *about* this situation. But first, God *did* something *in* Nehemiah. Any great work of God begins with God doing a great work in somebody.

i. God prepared this long ago, with Nehemiah's important position in Persia, with a heart curious about the welfare of Jerusalem and its people. Now we see that he had a heart that broke over their needy state.

ii. God saw the need in heaven, but little would be done until the right man also felt the need. God would do something great to meet that need through Nehemiah.

iii. But there is no way Nehemiah could do

this alone. He had to be a *leader* - one who *influences* other people - to get this job done. Nehemiah is a book all about *leadership* - something we obviously need today. Since leadership is *influence*, leadership applies to everyone. Everyone has an area of leadership. In some way, each one is a leader; the question is if they are a good leader or a bad leader.

iv. Leaders must prepare themselves for difficult work because it won't be easy.

"There is no winning without warfare; there is no opportunity without opposition; there is no victory without vigilance. For when ever the people of God say, 'Let us arise and build,' Satan says, 'Let me arise and oppose.'" (Redpath)

v. Leaders must have a big vision, and Nehemiah had one. "Through me, God is going to correct a problem that's been around a hundred and fifty years. Through me, God is going to do something that completely failed down before." We must have a vision, a goal, that is big enough.

c. I was fasting and praying before the

God of heaven: Nehemiah's reaction went beyond an immediate emotion. Many times a concern will come over us in a flush, and then quickly pass. But if it is from the Lord it will abide and grow and the burden will remain until the problem that prompted the burden is solved.

i. We should note as well what Nehemiah did *not* do: he did not complain, whine, or "see who could fix this problem." He immediately did what he knew he could do - pray, and intensely seek God in this situation.

d. **The God of heaven:** Nehemiah also had a clear understanding of Whom he fasted and prayed to. There are

many "gods" people trust in but only the **God of heaven** can really meet our needs.

B. Nehemiah's prayer.

1. Prayer is essential to leadership. If your vision is so big that only God can accomplish it, then you obviously must pray. If prayer isn't absolutely necessary to accomplish your vision, your goal isn't big enough.

a. It appears that Nehemiah prayed for four months before he did anything. Later, when the work of rebuilding the walls actually begins, it only takes 52 days to finish the job. But that 52-day project had a four-month foundation of prayer.

b. Nehemiah took his pain and stress to God in prayer - and seemingly, was able to leave it there. Prayer will relieve your stress. You may be trying to relieve stress through entertainment, but all that does is divert your attention. Entertainment doesn't give any solutions to stress. Prayer will give you strength; when you wait on the Lord in prayer, He will renew your strength (Isa. 40:31).

2. (5-7) Nehemiah comes to God in humility.

And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, *You* who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.

We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses."

a. **I pray, LORD God of heaven:** Humility begins by simply understanding there is a God enthroned in the heavens, and *I am not Him!*

Nehemiah recognizes exactly who God is: **LORD**

God of heaven . . . great and awesome

God . . . who keep Your covenant . . . and mercy . . . with those You love.

b. **Please let Your ear be attentive:** Humility also understands my complete dependence on God. When Nehemiah desperately asked God to **hear the prayer of Your servant (let Your ear be attentive . . . Your eyes open)**, it reflected his complete dependence on the LORD. Only God could help, and if God would only **hear**, Nehemiah knew He would help.

i. God will allow you to be fruitless to expose your need for total dependence.

c. **Confess the sins . . . which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned:**

Humility will also confess sin openly. Nehemiah plainly and simply confessed sin, without any attempt at excusing the sin.

i. We must always avoid *excusing* ourselves in the confession of our sin. May we never say, "Lord, *if* I sinned" or "Lord, I'm sorry, but You know how hard it was" or other such nonsense. We can find great freedom in open, honest confession, without any attempt at excuse or wondering "if" I sinned or not.

d. **Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You:**

Humility identifies with the needy. Obviously, Nehemiah was a godly man; but he openly and passionately put himself with his **father's house**, and prayed by using "**we**"

instead of "they."

i. "You never lighten the load unless first you have felt the pressure in your own soul. You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they are." (Redpath).

3. (8-10) Nehemiah comes to God looking to God's promises. "Remember, I pray, the word that You

commanded Your servant Moses, saying, '*If* you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but *if* you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' Now these *are* Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand."

a. **Remember:** This is a powerful way to come to God, asking Him to remember His promises.

Nehemiah said, "LORD, You made a promise to Moses and this nation, I ask you now to make good on it." Nehemiah quoted from both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 30.

i. This, no doubt, is the secret to great power in prayer: to *plead the promises of God*. We may be a bit annoyed when one of our children comes to us saying "Daddy, you promised"; but our Father in heaven *delights* in it - and often *demand*s it before prayer becomes effective.

ii. In Psa. 81:10 God says to His people, *Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it*. God will not open His storehouse until we open our mouths in asking Him to perform His promises.

b. **If you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them:** Nehemiah

quoted a *conditional* promise. The condition was returning to God, and keeping His commandments. He really couldn't know if the nation was keeping the commandments, but he knew that *he* was keeping them, and because he had identified himself with the nation in their sin the nation could also identify itself with Nehemiah in his godly fulfillment of these conditions.

4. (11) Nehemiah prays with a heart ready to *do* something.

"O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who

desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." For I was the king's cupbearer.

a. Grant him mercy in the sight of this

man: Nehemiah concluded by asking God to bless him when he would soon speak to the king of Persia about the matter. Nehemiah was going to *do* something about the sorry state of Jerusalem's walls and people, and he knows without God's intervention, he can do nothing.

b. Let Your servant prosper this day: This is a prayer of a man of *action*, not a sideline critic.

Nehemiah does not pray "God, make it all better" or "God, get someone *else* moving on this problem." Instead, his prayer is "God, *use me* to make it better."

i. "Recognition of need must be followed by earnest, persistent waiting upon God until

the overwhelming sense of world need becomes a specific burden in my soul for one particular piece of work which God would have me do." (Redpath)

ii. "Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak with other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise; but it occurred to him that he would do something himself." (Spurgeon)

© 2006 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission **2** Hanani, who was one of my relatives, along with some of the men from Judah, came to me, and I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and had survived the exile, and about Jerusalem.

3 They said to me, "The remnant that remains from the exile there in the province are experiencing considerable adversity and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem lies breached, and its gates have been burned down!"

4 When I heard these things I sat down abruptly, crying and mourning for several days. I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. **5** Then I said, "Please, O LORD God of heaven, great and awesome God, who keeps his loving covenant with those who love him and obey his commandments, **6** may your ear be attentive and your eyes be open to hear the prayer of your servant that I am praying to you today throughout both day and night on behalf of your servants the Israelites. I am confessing the sins of the Israelites that we have committed against you - both I myself and my family have sinned. **7** We have behaved corruptly against you, not obeying the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments that you commanded your servant Moses. **8** Please recall the word you commanded your servant Moses: 'If you act unfaithfully, I will scatter you among the nations. **9** But if you repent and obey my commandments and do them, then even if your dispersed people are in the most remote location, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen for my name to reside.' **10** They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your mighty strength and by your powerful hand. **11** Please, O Lord, listen attentively to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who take pleasure in showing respect to your name. Grant your servant success today and show compassion to me in the presence of this man."

Now I was cupbearer for the king.

1 Then in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought to me, I took the wine and gave it to the king. Previously I had not been depressed in the king's presence.

Guzik - Nehemiah 2:1-20

Nehemiah 2 - Nehemiah's Commission

A. Nehemiah the cupbearer.

1. (1-2) Nehemiah stands before the king.

And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, *when wine was* before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, "Why *is* your face sad, since you *are* not sick?

This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid,

a. **I took the wine and gave it to the king:** The last verse of Nehemiah 1 told us that Nehemiah was the *king's cupbearer* - a significant position in any ancient royal court.

The cupbearer was a personal *bodyguard* to the king, being the one who tasted wine and food before the king did - making certain no one could poison the king.

i. "The *cupbearer* was a high official in the royal household, whose basic duty of choosing and tasting the wine to demonstrate that it was not poisoned, and of presenting it to the king, gave him frequent access to the king's presence and made him potentially a man of influence." (Kidner)

ii. The king, therefore, had to have a tremendous amount of trust in his cupbearer, who had to be a man of faithful and impressive character. If the cupbearer could be turned against the king, assassination would be easy.

iii. The cupbearer also was a *servant* to the king; he was responsible for choosing most of the foods and wines the king and the court would enjoy.

iv. The cupbearer was also a trusted *advisor* to the king; since he was constantly in the king's presence, and greatly trusted, and a man of character, it was natural the cupbearer would often be asked his opinion on different matters coming before the king.

b. In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes: As Nehemiah gave wine to the king, care was given to note the specific day the events in Nehemiah 2 began.

i. Why was it so important for God to tell the date these things happened? First, to show that Nehemiah prayed and waited for four months with the kind of heart described previously in Nehemiah 1. During those four month, Nehemiah's prayer was likely "LORD, either take this burden from my heart or show me how to be the man to answer this burden."

ii. The date is also important, because it establishes the date given to restore Jerusalem and its walls. Dan. 9:25 says that exactly 173,880 days from this day - which was March 14, 445 B.C. - Messiah the prince would be presented to Israel. Sir Robert Anderson, the eminent British astronomer and mathematician, makes a strong case that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy exactly, to the day, entering Jerusalem on April 6, 32 A.D., precisely 173,880 days from Neh. 2:1.

c. I had never been sad in his presence

before: On that particular day, Nehemiah noted that he had never been sad or depressed in the presence of the king, and on this day when the king took notice, Nehemiah **became dreadfully afraid**. As was true in the courts of many ancient kings, it was forbidden to be sad in the presence of the king. The idea was that the king was such a wonderful person that merely being in his presence was supposed to make you forget all of your problems. When Nehemiah looked sad, it could have been taken as a terrible insult to the king.

i. When the king said " **This is nothing but sorrow of heart**," Nehemiah knew the king had noticed his sadness,

and that the king took it seriously. Nehemiah must have wondered if the next words from the king would be, "Off with his head!"

ii. Nehemiah was also afraid because he knew that he was going to the king for something very important. There was a lot riding on what was going to happen in response to this question.

iii. Nehemiah understood it was not his place to change the king's heart. He prayed and left it up to the LORD, instead of dropping hints and trying to manipulate the situation.

Then one day, four months later, the king's heart was different. Are we making the mistake of trying to change someone else's heart, instead of leaving it up to the LORD to do it?

2. (3) Nehemiah's response.

And said to the king, "May the king live forever!

Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, *lies waste*, and its gates are burned with fire?"

a. **May the king live forever!** Nehemiah had probably said this many times before. This was probably almost a motto among professional cupbearers; since they tasted the wine and food before the king did, they naturally wished the king a good long life.

b. **The city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire:** With this, Nehemiah explained why he was sad. Jerusalem was a destroyed, disgraced city.

i. No one had to tell the king this was a disgraceful state of affairs; he would immediately sympathize with Nehemiah's concern for the dignity, safety, and well-being of his people.

ii. We see also Nehemiah's great tact and

wisdom, because he tells of his concern without specifically mentioning the name of the city. The king would naturally have a bad association with the name "Jerusalem," knowing from history it was a city rebellious against the Persians and resistant to their rule. Nehemiah gets the sympathy of the king on his side before he reveals the city!

c. Why should my face not be sad:

Nehemiah's answer was not only wise, it was *honest*. Often, when are we visibly depressed or troubled, and when someone asks us about it, we simply reply "Nothing's wrong!" or "Oh, I'm O.K." At those times, we aren't *honest*.

i. Many people are troubled by this dilemma.

No one wants to be a whiner, boring others with our problems when the other person may only be asking out of common courtesy.

On the other hand, we know the tremendous value there can be in sharing our concerns with someone else who can pray with us and perhaps share some wisdom from the Bible.

ii. One way to live in this kind of honesty is to seek out others whom we know and trust, and sharing with them our struggles and needs. But if we don't know a person well enough to feel confident sharing our personal life, we can still ask them to pray for us in general. They don't need to know all the details to pray, because God knows all the details. Also, when someone asks if we are troubled, we can be open to the idea that this person is special gift to us at this time.

iii. However, we must avoid two traps. First, we must avoid "shopping" for advice - asking many people, telling all of them our problems until we find the advice we want.

Second, we must be especially careful of talking to others in a way that puts the problem on other people - people who aren't there to give their side of the story.

Nehemiah didn't say to the king, "I'm sad because those incompetents in Jerusalem have had 100 years to build the walls and they haven't done anything. They are a bunch of hardened, uncaring, worthless people." He described the problem without putting anyone else to blame. When we fail

to do this, there's a word for it: *gossip*.

iv. When we are the person whom others ask for prayer or whom others come to for help, it is helpful to guard against the temptation to know every detail of the problem. Of course it is *interesting* to hear the details of others problems, but we do not need to know all the fine points. Our

prayer is still valuable if we don't know all the details. We are not less able to lead

them to Jesus for His loving care. Some things need to be talked out more than others, but sometimes we want the other person to talk it out more for *us* than for *them*.

3. (4-8) Nehemiah's request.

Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors *of the region* beyond the River, that they

must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which *pertains* to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the king granted *them* to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

a. **What do you request?** Right away, Nehemiah knew God gave him favor with the king. His response wasn't "Off with his head!"

but "What can I do to help?" Nehemiah knew that four months of prayer were answered.

b. **So I prayed to the God of heaven:** Knowing his prayer had been answered,

Nehemiah prayed again. This was not a long, extended prayer (he could have said, "Well king, let me pray about it for a few days and then I'll get back to you"). Instead, this was an immediate, silent, "Help me LORD!" prayer.

Nehemiah knew this was an incredible opportunity, and he did not want to miss the chance.

i. It is wonderful to labor long in prayer; but prayer does not have to be long to be effective. This is especially true when the situation will not allow a long prayer.

c. **I ask that you send me to Judah:**

Nehemiah again showed great wisdom as he respectfully asked for a leave of absence and to be *sent* (**you send me**) by the king. He asked the king to share his concern for Jerusalem and to become a partner in getting the city and its people back where they should be.

i. Nehemiah's vision was also revealed: **that I may rebuild it**. That was a huge job and a big goal. Nehemiah isn't going on a mere fact-finding expedition, or to tell the leaders of Jerusalem what a bad job they were doing. He goes to get the work done, trusting in God all the way!

ii. Again, Nehemiah shows wisdom by

referring to Jerusalem without specifically mentioning the city (**send me to Judah, to the city of my father's tombs**). Although, we can also say that Nehemiah is not being deceptive. Though Jerusalem might have historically been a rebellious city to Persia, it isn't any longer - and will not be.

d. It pleased the king to send me:

Nehemiah's sympathetic heart, his months of prayer, his moment of prayer, his great faith, his big vision, and his wise responses were all answered positively. The king was enthusiastic about supporting Nehemiah in this venture.

e. I set him a time: As a capable leader, Nehemiah clearly had a *plan*. The four months in prayer were not only spent in talking to God, but also in *listening* to Him and in working out a Spirit-led plan for what to do when God did open the door.

i. Nehemiah knew how long he would need to be gone (**I set him a time**). He knew he would need letters of safe passage from the king (**let letters be given to me**). He knew what kind of materials would be needed (**timber**). He knew what work

needed to be done (**the gates of the citadel . . . the city wall . . . the house I will occupy**).

Nehemiah knew all of this without ever having seen for himself the condition of Jerusalem before! Nehemiah knew the needs by carefully and patiently seeking God.

ii. Nehemiah had a plan, and God always works through a plan. The LORD our God is a planning God: *The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations.* (Psa. 33:11). From the beginning of the plan of salvation in eternity past, God has a plan and is working it out.

iii. Sometimes it may seem that God blesses a lack of planning, and sometimes it seems God does a blessed work completely

different from what we have planned. But in every case, God works through planning - if not our planning, then His planning. But as a general principle, God wants to train us up into the work of being planners, just as He is a planner.

iv. *The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.* (Pro. 21:5) Faith is no substitute for planning. We aren't more spiritual for failing to plan and for shooting from the hip. There may be sometimes when

we simply can't plan, but we should never reject planning.

f. **He must give me timber:** Nehemiah was also a bold man, not afraid to ask others to help when he knew they had the resources to help.

Once the king was willing to be a part of Nehemiah's goal (**it pleased the king to send me**), he went right on to ask for an official seal of approval on the project (**letters . . . for the governors**) and for the king to finance the project (**that he must give me timber**).

i. Nehemiah didn't ask because he wanted to take advantage of the king. Instead, he showed honor and respect to the king by inviting him to participate in a worthy work.

He knew the king was *able* to provide these things; he sensed the king's heart was *willing*, and so he shows the king how he can do what his willing heart wants to do!

g. **And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God**

upon me: Though this was a pagan king, Nehemiah still understood that God could work through him in a mighty way. God can provide for our needs in totally unexpected or unlikely ways.

B. Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem.

1. (9-10) Arrival and opposition.

Then I went to the governors *in the region* beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent

captains of the army and horsemen with me. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard *of it*, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

a. **Then I went:** This is another example of Nehemiah's godly leadership. He actually **went** - he traveled the 800 miles from Persia to

Jerusalem to do the work of rebuilding the walls and the people.

i. Many people have a heart touched like Nehemiah's. They may also have the heart for prayer, the wisdom, the vision, the plan and the faith of a Nehemiah - but they stop short of actually going out and *doing* what needs to be done for the goal to become a reality.

ii. Sometimes we substitute *talking* about something for actually doing it. It is one thing to stand around with other believers

and talk about doing some evangelism;

praying about it, planning it, talking about it

- it is another thing to actually go out and *do* it. God is in the *doing* of the thing.

iii. Our spiritual enemies don't mind as long as *all* we do is plan and pray and talk; but when God's people start *doing* something, they take notice.

b. **Beyond the River:** This means "beyond the Euphrates River," an important landmark that separated one region from another. Once a traveler crossed the river, they were on the road to the region of Judea and the city of Jerusalem.

At this point Nehemiah spoke to the **governors** of this region who ruled under the Persians.

c. **Gave them the king's letters:** Nehemiah came prepared. He had letters showing he was truly sent by the king. He had **captains of the army and horsemen** with him. He also had substantial supplies of lumber from the king's forest. Truly, the king of Persia had responded to

Nehemiah's invitation to become a partner in the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

d. **Sanballat the Horonite . . . Tobiah the Ammonite:**

At the governor's station, Nehemiah met these two enemies of Jerusalem and anyone who cared for the welfare of the city. **They were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.**

i. These two cared nothing as long as Jerusalem was weak and vulnerable; even though the temple was there, and worship conducted, that was fine - as long as the people of God were not strong, secure, and free from stress.

ii. Notice when this opposition came: not at the heart stage, not at the vision stage, not at the prayer stage, not at the planning stage, but when progress came in *doing* something.

iii. Some people fear ever stepping out for the LORD, because they know opposition will come. They somehow think their life will be better or easier if they stay in their low, mediocre state before God. What deception!

A better life from holding back for Jesus

Christ? Tough times are going to come

anyway; but when we are growing and stepping forth in the Lord, we are far more equipped to deal with them.

2. (11-16) Nehemiah makes a secret tour of Jerusalem and her walls.

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode.

And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of

Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire.

Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but *there was* no room for the animal under me to pass. So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

a. **So I came to Jerusalem:** After being in Jerusalem **three days**, Nehemiah still did not tell anyone why he is there and what God has put on his heart: **I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem.**

i. When Nehemiah entered Jerusalem with a military escort and lumber from the king of Persia's forest, people would notice him -

but he didn't say anything about his mission until the time was right. Good leaders learn a sense of God's timing.

ii. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, full of heart, full of prayer, full of faith, full of wisdom, full of a big vision, full of support from the king, and finally gets to his destination - and he did nothing for three days.

iii. **I told no one:** "It is good to have Christian friends, but it is dangerous to wear your heart on your sleeve. Have a secret place somewhere which nobody knows anything about but you and God." (Redpath).

iv. "You will often find it best not to commit your plans to others. If you want to serve

God, go and do it, and then let other people find it out afterwards. You have no need to tell what you are going to do, and, I may add, there is no need for you retelling what you have done, for very, very frequently God withdraws himself when we boast of what is being done." (Spurgeon).

b. **I went out by night through the Valley Gate:** It seems that Nehemiah set out from the west side of the city, and turned left towards the south, continuing counter-clockwise around the rubble of the city walls, until coming back to his starting point.

c. **And viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates**

which were burned with fire: Nehemiah wasn't just sightseeing. Instead, he carefully studied the broken down walls and the burned gates. The word **viewed** in Neh. 2:13 and 2:15

is a medical term for "probing a wound to see the extent of its damage."

i. For the first time, Nehemiah saw with his eyes what had been reported to him, and what God had called him to repair. There is no way he could have made this tour with a dry eye, knowing the extent of the damage and the fear, poverty, and insecurity the broken walls meant in the lives of the people.

d. **The walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were**

burned with fire: Nehemiah knew the job of rebuilding the walls couldn't go forth unless he saw exactly how bad the situation was.

i. Nehemiah could have focused on all that was right with Jerusalem. They were back in Judah and, the forced exile was over. The temple was built. Sacrifice and worship were conducted. Progress was being made, slow as it was. There was much to be thankful for in Jerusalem - but sometimes, one must look at what is wrong, and that is what Nehemiah did.

ii. We deceive ourselves if we only look to what is good. Some have no trouble with

this; they *a/ways* find it easy to see what is wrong. They are full of criticism. They believe they have the unique spiritual gift of pointing out what is wrong. But Nehemiah teaches us by example - we must look at the broken down towers, and carefully study what is wrong - but only if we have the heart, the prayer, the vision, the passion to be used of God to set it right. There is little use in the Kingdom of God for sideline critics, back seat drivers, and Monday morning quarterbacks.

iii. But with the right hearts - hearts ready to *act* - we have to take an honest look. "It is utter folly to refuse to believe that things are as bad as they really are. It is vital in any undertaking for God to know the worst, for whenever there is to be a wonderful

movement of the Holy Spirit, it begins with someone like Nehemiah who was bold

enough to look at facts, to diagnose them,

and then to rise to the task." (Redpath) iv. When we look at other Christians around us, we see that many are strong, joyful, growing, in their relationship with Jesus

Christ. Many have victory over sin and we

are thankful for that. But you can also see the figurative walls in their life and see some broken down portions. Some among us are desperately hurting or are trapped in a cycle of sin and want to get out, but don't know

how to ask for help. Some feel like they are on the outside looking in. Some respect God, but haven't yet given their lives to Jesus Christ. God can, and will, build up all the broken down portions of these figurative walls.

v. When we take a look at our children, we know that we love them and we care for them. But when we look at them honestly we see their weaknesses of character and

the areas where they fall short. We soberly consider what will become of them if those weaknesses dominate their entire personality. We consider what will happen if they grow up rejecting Jesus, and of their future ruin unless God uses us to train and nurture their character.

vi. In the same way, when we look at our business, our relationships, our friendships, we should take an honest look, and not only look at what is pretty.

vii. When we look at the church, we love the church and are thankful for what God does

here. But when we look honestly, we are probably not satisfied with the impact we have made on this community. We cannot say that it is enough or that there should not be far more. We think of the financial

support and the outreach and the spread of the Word of God through the church, and yet know that it could be more and that the ministry could go out further and broader.

viii. If someone took a tour of your life the same way Nehemiah took a tour of

Jerusalem they might notice many broken down portions in the figurative walls of your life. Pro. 25:28 says: *Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.* Many lives are like a city with broken walls - living with a constant sense of fear, poverty, and insecurity. We should not hide our eyes from these broken down places; God wants to change them, and make the first steps of change right away.

e. The walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were

burned with fire: As much as anything, Nehemiah took time to count the cost before starting the work. He has a *heart*, he has *faith*, he has a *vision* - but before that vision

can become a reality, he has to see exactly what has to be done, and what it will cost - in terms of time, effort, money, and leadership.

3. (17-18) Nehemiah meets with the leaders of Jerusalem.

Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to *this* good *work*.

a. **You see the distress that we are in:** The citizens and leaders of Jerusalem were not sitting around waiting for a superman to come along and rebuild their walls. In all probability, they had come to accept that it was an impossible job. It seemed that no one could fix a 100 year-old problem. Years ago, when

someone tried, enemies simply stopped them.

So they lived with it.

b. **Then I said to them:** Now, when Nehemiah came and explained his vision for the rebuilding of the walls to the leaders of the city, there was a tremendous amount of importance attached to the meeting. Nehemiah could not do the job by himself, and he was in a lot of trouble if leaders didn't support him.

i. No doubt this was something Nehemiah prayed about a lot. He might have prayed something like this, "O LORD, prepare the hearts of the leaders of Jerusalem to support this work You have called me to. Let them see I do not come condemning or criticizing them, only to help. Give me the right words to say, and speak to them ahead of time about this work You have called me to."

c. **The distress that we are in:** Nehemiah *wisely* approached the leaders of Jerusalem. He had to. In the accomplishment of any vision or goal - or at least of a God-

sized vision or goal, there will be certain people *essential* to accomplishing the goal - you *must* have their help. Nehemiah's wise approach gives us an example to follow.

- Wisely, Nehemiah asked them to notice the obvious: **You see the distress;** sometimes, the obvious is the hardest to see.

- Wisely, Nehemiah did not come as if he was there to fix *their* problem: **the distress that we are in.** Nehemiah owned the problem as his also, even though he might not have. Nehemiah didn't play the blame game. He didn't criticize the leaders of Jerusalem. He simply identified right along with them regarding the problem.

- Wisely, Nehemiah asked for their partnership: **Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem.** Nehemiah figured if God could move upon the heart of a pagan king to partner in this work, He certainly could move upon the hearts of His own people to join in! Nehemiah wasn't there to do it *for* them, but to partner *with* them in the job of restoring Jerusalem and its people.

- Wisely, Nehemiah pointed them to the result: **that we may no longer be a reproach.** This wasn't really about bricks and mortar; it was about removing a condition of shame, fear, poverty, and insecurity among God's people. The hard work involving bricks and mortar would be worth it, because it would have real spiritual impact in both individuals and the community. When David saw Goliath and was outraged that this monster was casting disgrace on the people of God, he simply said, " *Is there not a cause?* " (1Sa. 17:29). Everyone else was self-focused and figuring the odds, and David said, "let's get the job done. I'm willing for God to use

me to do it."

- Wisely, Nehemiah encouraged them in the

LORD: **I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me.**

Nehemiah assured the leaders this wasn't *his* project, it was *God's* project. If people sense your vision is really all about *you*, and raising *you* up, and making *you* great, they will rightly be hesitant. But if it is from God, and they can see it, they will be thrilled to partner with you.

- Wisely, Nehemiah gave them confidence

by telling of what God had already done: **I told them . . . of the king's words that he had spoken to me.**

Nehemiah could say, "Look, you can know this is of God; the heart of the king of Persia has been touched by the Lord to support this project!" If something has God's fingerprints on it, people will want to support it; if it has only man's fingerprints on it, they will rightly hesitate.

d. **And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me:** We also notice what Nehemiah *didn't* do; he didn't beg or make deals. Nehemiah had a high calling from God, and asked others to be part of that vision, but he never stopped treating it like a high calling. He wasn't going to be a carnival barker trying to manipulate people into knocking over milk bottles even when they really didn't want to do it.

i. Nehemiah didn't offer rewards, incentives, or vacations out at the Sea of Galilee for the ones who got the job done. Those are all external motivations, and aren't God's highest calling. Nehemiah simply said, "Let's stop kidding around. We know there's a job to be done, and God is leading us to get it done now." He relied on the LORD and the leaders to create a true *inward* motivation.

External motivation - manipulation, guilt, pressure, carnal rewards can work for a

while, but are never a part of God's vision for getting things done.

e. **Let us rise up and build:** This response of the leaders of Jerusalem was of God. They said, "Yes, Nehemiah, we're with you!" This was all the more remarkable considering the ways they might have responded - ways we might respond when we are challenged to partner in a work.

They might have denied the *need* for the walls. "You know, we have gotten along without those walls for a hundred years now! After all, we already have the temple!"

But we want to do far more than simply "get along." God has more for us, and *now* is the time to enter in.

They might have seen the project as *too much work*. "Well Nehemiah, it's a fine work, and we hope it goes well for you. Don't think we can help you now." But we are willing to pay the price for something that is truly of God.

They might have seen the *opposition as too strong*. "Nehemiah, why even start? We tried before and our enemies stopped us. It will just happen again." But we have more faith than that.

f. **Then they set their hands to do this**

good work: This shows God's hand at work here. Nehemiah's *heart*, his *prayer*, his *boldness*, his *big vision*, his *action*, and his *wisdom*, were all rewarded. This was a God-inspired thing; God moved the hearts of the leaders to do this.

i. We know that Nehemiah was a great leader because people followed him. The people he was meant to lead were genuinely influenced by his leadership.

4. (19) The opposition rises in response to the work of God. But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard *of it*, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What *is* this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

a. **But when Sanballat the Horonite,**

Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it: Things had been going extraordinarily well, so we are not surprised that opposition came up again. **Sanballat the Horonite** and **Tobiah the Ammonite official** both came to oppose the work.

i. Spiritual opposition to the work God wants to accomplish is a reality many Christians fail to take account of, and are thus defeated in what God would want them to do.

ii. The Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, took on humanity to experience

spiritual warfare even as you do; He knows

what it is to be under attack, how to break through to victory, and so He knows how to

lead His people to victory.

b. **Sanballat . . . Tobiah:** These two first surfaced in Neh. 2:10; they *were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel*. They had previously made their opinion known; now they will seek to *do* something about the progress Nehemiah is making.

i. **Tobiah** (a Jewish name) was a man of influence, being associated with the high priest's family, and getting help from the

priests (Neh. 13:4). "Tobiah" was a prominent name in priestly families for

generations to come. The name "Tobiah"

means "Yahweh is good" - a strange name for a man who was an opponent of the work of God.

ii. **Sanballat** was connected by marriage to priestly families (Neh. 13:28). An ancient document from this period refers to Sanballat as "governor of Samaria." (Kidner)

iii. These men were Jews - were fellow

brothers - of Nehemiah and the citizens of

Jerusalem. We might have thought they

would have supported his work, but they do

not. Opposition is always difficult; but when it comes from brothers, it is then mixed with the pain of betrayal as well.

iv. The Bible makes it clear we have enemies and opponents also, but chiefly they are

spiritual enemies: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against . . .*

spiritual armies of wickedness in heavenly places (Eph. 6:12). However, we also realize that attacks from spiritual enemies can come through flesh-and-blood people (Mat.

16:23). We can experience spiritual attack

on a direct inward level from spiritual

enemies, or through people who are,

wittingly or unwittingly, being used as tools by our spiritual enemies.

c. **They laughed us to scorn:** Sanballat and Tobiah used **scorn** in their attack. They wanted Nehemiah to feel mocked, stupid, and foolish.

They laughed us to scorn shows that they showed their spite (**and despised us**) with a humorous edge.

i. This scorn may come to us in an inward

feeling ("Who am I trying to kid? I must be some kind of fool!"). Or it may come through the words of those who, if they know it or not, are being used by our spiritual enemies.

ii. Many are turned away from God's will

because they experience or fear scorn. Men

who were not afraid of death have been

manipulated because they did not want to

be laughed at. It seems that sooner or later, God will allow

every Christian to be tested at this point; as to whom they

regard more, man or God. We must never be more

concerned about what people may say about

us than what God requires of us.

iii. The way that Sanballat and Tobiah used laughter and scorn as weapons against the

work of God should also make us reflect on

our own use of humor. Some Christians who

are otherwise well-meaning are tools of the enemy, all for the sake of a few laughs.

d. **Will you rebel against the king?** This shows that Sanballat and Tobiah had a low view of God's authority. Their question showed that they figured the king of Persia was the highest authority in the land.

i. First, they were completely ignorant. They didn't know what they spoke about. The

king *had* given permission, even if they didn't know it. The king was *partner* in the work. Many times, those who are being used by our spiritual enemies against us simply don't know what they are talking about.

ii. Second, they were not concerned with God's authority. Really, it did not matter if the King of Persia was against this work, if the God of heaven and earth was for it. One with God makes a majority. Nehemiah could have turned the question back on them: *Will you rebel against the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?*

5. (20) Nehemiah's answer to his opponents.

So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

a. **So I answered them:** Nehemiah ignored their scorn. His bold, straightforward words showed he had not been put on the defensive by their mocking, scornful attack.

i. When faced with the choice of pleasing man or pleasing God, Nehemiah knew exactly what he would do. Let them mock - he would serve the LORD.

b. **And said to them:** Nehemiah did not give a point-by-point reply. He did not show the document proving the king's support of the project. If he did, Sanballat and Tobiah would have just claimed it was a forgery, or would have come up with

another objection. Nehemiah knew that hearts that refuse to be convinced will *never* be convinced.

c. **The God of heaven Himself will prosper us:** Nehemiah instead proclaimed his confidence in God. "It doesn't matter if you are against us. God's work will succeed."

i. Nehemiah didn't put the work on hold while a crisis response team figured out the best way to answer Sanballat and Tobiah.

He wasn't going to let them sidetrack him.

He had a work to do and he was going to do

it. If you allow your enemies to get you to stop what you should be doing and give all your attention to them, then your enemies have won.

ii. There is a touch of holy boldness in Nehemiah's response. "Go ahead and take your best shot. It won't work. God is with us. He isn't with you. You will fail. We will prosper under the hand of the God of heaven!"

d. **We His servants . . . will arise and build:** Nehemiah proclaimed *who he was* and *what he would do*.

i. Nehemiah and his followers were **servants** of God. Sanballat and Tobiah felt confident because they were servants of the king; but Nehemiah is a servant of God.

ii. Nehemiah and his followers had a job to do. Not for a moment did he say, "Gee, maybe this isn't God's will!" They had agreed to **rise up and build** (Neh. 2:18), and they will do it.

iii. In facing our enemies, we must always keep focus on *who we are* and *what we should do*. Failure to see these will always lead to defeat. These are exactly the things our spiritual enemies want us to forget! And sometimes, you just have to proclaim it!

e. You have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem:

Nehemiah proclaimed the truth about his enemies. They may have been Jews by birth; they may have been legal citizens of Jerusalem; they may have owned property in the city. But their hearts showed they had no **heritage or right or memorial** in God's city.

i. Nehemiah sized these two up more quickly than we often do. He knew they weren't for

him or for Jerusalem, or for God at all - though they may have claimed to be. It was as if Nehemiah said, "You don't belong here.

God's doing a great work here, and you don't want to be part of it. Just move on."

ii. We can say the same to our spiritual enemies: "You have no heritage or right or memorial in me. I belong to Jesus Christ.

You don't belong here. You may as well move on because I'm not going anywhere."

iii. This opposition did not immediately melt away. We often wish that if we did

everything right as Nehemiah did here, then the opposition would just go away. But it

didn't. These two opposed the work all the way until it was finished. *But they didn't stop it.* God's work got done, and they were proved completely wrong.

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2 So the king said to me, "Why do you appear to be depressed when you aren't sick? What can this be other than sadness of heart?" This made me very fearful.

3 I replied to the king, "O king, live forever! Why would I not appear dejected when the city with the graves of my ancestors lies desolate and its gates destroyed by fire?" **4**

The king responded, "What is it you are seeking?" Then I quickly prayed to the God of heaven **5** and said to the king, "If the king is so inclined and if your servant has found favor

in your sight, dispatch me to Judah, to the city with the graves of my ancestors, so that I can rebuild it.” **6**

Then the king, with his consort sitting beside him, replied, “How long would your trip take, and when would you return?” Since the king was amenable to dispatching me, I gave him a time. **7** I said to the king, “If the king is so inclined, let him give me letters for the governors of Trans-Euphrates that will enable me to travel safely until I reach Judah, **8** and a letter for Asaph the keeper of the king’s nature preserve, so that he will give me timber for beams for the gates of the fortress adjacent to the temple and for the city wall and for the house to which I go.” So the king granted me these requests, for the good hand of my God was on me. **9** Then I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, and I presented to them the letters from the king. The king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. **10** When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard all this, they were very displeased that someone had come to seek benefit for the Israelites.

11 So I came to Jerusalem. When I had been there for three days, **12** I got up during the night, along with a few men who were with me. But I did not tell anyone what my God was putting on my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no animals with me, except for the one I was riding.

13 I proceeded through the Valley Gate by night, in the direction of the Well of the Dragons and the Dung Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem that had been breached and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. **14** I passed on to the Gate of the Well and the King’s Pool, where there was not enough room for my animal to pass with me. **15** I continued up the valley during the night, inspecting the wall. Then I turned back and came to the Valley Gate, and so returned. **16** The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had been doing, for up to this point I had not told any of the Jews or the priests or the nobles or the officials or the rest of the workers. **17** Then I said to them, “You see the

problem that we have: Jerusalem is desolate and its gates are burned. Come on!

Let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that this reproach will not continue." **18** Then I related to them how the good hand of my God was on me and what the king had said to me. Then they replied, "Let's begin rebuilding right away!"

So they readied themselves for this good project. **19** But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard all this, they derided us and expressed contempt toward us. They said, "What is this you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" **20** I responded to them by saying, "The God of heaven will prosper us. We his servants will start the rebuilding. But you have no just or ancient right in Jerusalem."

1 Then Eliashib the high priest and his priestly colleagues arose and built the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and erected its doors, working as far as the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel.

Guzik - Nehemiah 3:1-32

Nehemiah 3 - The Building of the Walls

A. The record of the builders.

1. (1-2) Builders near the Sheep Gate.

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, *and* consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel. Next to *Eliashib* the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

a. **They built . . . built . . . built:** Nehemiah 3

is all about work - how individuals pitched in and did the work together, coordinated and led by Nehemiah.

b. **And built the Sheep Gate:** The work is described in reference to the gates of the wall.

The gates were the critical entry and exit points to the city, and the places most likely to see an enemy attack. Therefore the work started at each gate and worked out from there.

i. The **Sheep Gate** was so named because it was the gate where shepherds brought their flocks to sell them. Up until a few years ago, this same gate was being used for this same purpose in Jerusalem.

c. **Eliashib the high priest**: This was the first worker mentioned. He **rose up** to do the work with the other priests, and they worked at rebuilding the **Sheep Gate** and the section of wall near there.

i. **Eliashib the high priest** acted as a godly leader should; he was out in front of the work, leading by example. He did not act as if he was too "spiritual" for the hard work of rebuilding the walls.

ii. If you are a leader, others are looking hard at you and they follow your example. If you are slow to work, they will be also; if you are full of discouragement and doubt, they will follow. There is a good reason why **Eliashib** was first mentioned, and why the rest of the chapter is filled with the names of more than 50 others that followed his example in the work.

d. **They consecrated it**: The idea behind consecration is to recognize something as special, as uniquely set apart for God's glory and service. These city gates were made special to God. Nehemiah and Eliashib knew that God wanted *everything* set apart special to Him, including these city walls and gates.

i. Because the first of the work was specially set apart to God, it was a way for them to

say, "All of this work belongs to You, LORD.

This is a special work done unto You."

ii. This is a great secret to joy and success in life: to do everything as unto the LORD. *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* (Col. 3:17)

e. **Next to Eliashib the men of Jericho built**: Every man's work was important, and though these did not work on a gate, they

did the important job of building up the walls of protection and security for Jerusalem.

2. (3-5) Builders near the Fish Gate.

Also the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. And next to them Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, made repairs. Next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs. Next to them Zadok the son of Baana made repairs. Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.

a. **The Fish Gate:** This gate got its name because of the nearby fish market. The **sons of Hassenaah** did the work of rebuilding the gate while others helped.

b. **Made repairs:** The word for **repairs** is the Hebrew word *chazaq*, used 35 times in this chapter alone. It has the idea of strengthening, encouraging, of making something strong (Kidner). These are principles that have application to far more than *material* gates and walls.

i. The Bible says that we must be *built up* and *repaired*. In Eph. 4:12, God says the purpose of the church is *for the equipping of the saints*, and idea behind *equipping* is to prepare, strengthen, and make something able to be used. We come together as

Christians to strengthen one another, to make us strong and able to live for Jesus and serve Him outside the gatherings of the church.

c. **Next to them the Tekoites made repairs:** The **Tekoites** did their work. The people of the city of Tekoa were more than willing to work -

but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord . For the most part, people joined in - but not *everybody*.

These **nobles** from the city of Tekoa thought they were above the hard work, so they didn't join in.

i. Literally, the idea in the Hebrew is that they wouldn't submit - they would not "bend their necks" to what the LORD wanted them to do. The real issue was submission. Maybe they thought they had a better plan, maybe they didn't like how Nehemiah was doing it.

Whatever their reason, you can be sure they later regretted it, because they stand in infamy as the only people mentioned in this chapter who *did not* join in the work.

ii. Perhaps Nehemiah wanted to record the *names* of each of these nobles, but the LORD made him have mercy and only indicate them in a general way.

3. (6-12) Builders near the Old Gate.

Moreover Jehoiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors, with its bolts and bars. And next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, repaired the residence of the governor *of the region* beyond the River. Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Also next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs; and they fortified Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. And next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, leader of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house.

And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabniah made repairs. Malchijah the son of Harim and Hashub the son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section, as well as the Tower of the Ovens. And next to him was Shallum the son of Hallohesh, leader of half the district of Jerusalem; he and his daughters made repairs.

a. Moreover Jehoiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah

repaired the Old Gate: Among the repairers of the **Old Gate** and its nearby walls was **Uzziel, the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths**. Along side him was **Hananiah, one of the perfumers**.

i. These were men of different professions, not professional builders. They were not trained for this kind of work. It would have seemed they had an easy excuse to not do

anything, but they jumped in and did the work. **They fortified Jerusalem**, even though many would not think them qualified or able.

ii. The most important ability in the work of the LORD is **availability**. The one with few gifts and little talent, who has a passion and a drive to see God's work done, will accomplish far more than a gifted and talented person who doesn't have they passion and drive to do the LORD's work.

iii. "Viggo Olsen, who helped rebuild ten thousand houses in war-raved Bangladesh in

1972, derived unexpected inspiration from

reading a chapter ordinarily considered one of the least interesting in the Bible: 'I was struck . . . that no expert builders were listed in the "Holy Land brigade." There were priests, priests' helpers, goldsmiths, perfume makers, and women, but no expert builders or carpenters were named.'" (Yamauchi) b. **The Broad Wall**: Today you can see in Jerusalem the remains of this **Broad Wall** - and broad it is, more than 20 feet (6 meters) wide.

Critics had denied the accuracy of Bible history like this, but the archaeologist's shovel constantly confirms the truth of the Bible.

c. **Rephaiah the son of Hur, leader of half the district of Jerusalem**: He worked on this section of the wall. Here was another **leader** who knew real leadership is getting down and doing it - being a servant, instead of expecting others to do it for you.

d. **Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house**: Five times in the Nehemiah 3, it speaks of those who worked on the section right in front of their **house**.

Often, we need to give attention to the work of God right at our own homes. If the work needs to be done anywhere, it needs to be done at our homes.

i. The names of the men who are said to have **made repairs in front of his house** are interesting:

- Nehemiah 3:10 mentions **Jedaiah**, and his name means *He who calls unto God*.

Our homes must be places of prayer, where the family calls unto God.

- Nehemiah 3:23 mentions **Benjamin**, and his name means *Son of my right hand*, speaking of a protector. Our homes must be places of protection and peace.

- Nehemiah 3:29 mentions **Zadok**, and his name means *Justice*. Our homes must be places of justice and integrity, especially with integrity regarding our marital vows and promises.

- Nehemiah 3:30 mentions **Meshullam**, and his name means *Devoted*. Our homes must be places of devotion and separation to God.

e. **Malchijah son of Harim**: This man is mentioned in Ezr. 10:31 as one of the men who was confronted by Ezra for the sin of taking on a pagan wife. That was many years before this, so **Malchijah** got things right with God and now, years later, he served Him.

i. A believer should never let a past failure get in the way of serving God. Repent, set it right, make a stand for righteousness - and get on serving the LORD.

f. **Shallum the son of Hallohesh . . . he and his daughters made repairs**: *Everyone* who could help did help in the repairs.

i. With the great number of different people working on the walls, it was imperative that they all work with the same mind - or the wall would not be uniform and would not be a strong defense. Yet, each section was a little different because different people worked on each section.

ii. In the same way, in the family of God, the work must be done with a common vision and mindset - *the mind of Christ*, as Paul described it in 1Co. 2:16. When believers work together in one accord, yet with each

offering their distinctive gifts, the work of God gets done in a glorious way.

4. (13) Builders near the Valley Gate.

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and *repaired* a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Refuse Gate.

5. (14) Builders near the Refuse Gate.

Malchijah the son of Rechab, leader of the district of Beth Hacerem, repaired the Refuse Gate; he built it and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.

6. (15-25) Builders near the Fountain Gate.

Shallun the son of Col-Hozeh, leader of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he built it, covered it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah by the King's Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David. After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, leader of half the district of Beth Zur, made repairs as far as *the place* in front of the tombs of David, to the man-made pool, and as far as the House of the Mighty. After him the Levites, *under* Rehum the son of Bani, made repairs. Next to him Hashabiah, leader of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. After him their brethren, *under* Bavai the son of Henadad, leader of the *other* half of the district of Keilah, made repairs. And next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the leader of Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the Ascent to the Armory at the buttress.

After him Baruch the son of Zabbai carefully repaired the other section, from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

After him Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, repaired another section, from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. And after him the priests, the men of the plain, made repairs. After him Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house.

After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs by his house. After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the

buttress, even as far as the corner. Palal the son of Uzai *made repairs* opposite the buttress, and on the tower which projects from the king's upper house that *was* by the court of the prison.

After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh *made repairs*.

a. **By the King's Garden:** Charles Spurgeon preached a beautiful sermon on this text, where he spoke of six different gardens of the King: Eden, Gethsemane, the Garden Tomb, the human heart, the church as a whole, and the garden of Paradise in heaven.

7. (26-27) Builders near the Water Gate.

Moreover the Nethinim who dwelt in Ophel *made repairs* as far as *the place* in front of the Water Gate toward the east, and on the projecting tower. After them the Tekoites repaired another section, next to the great projecting tower, and as far as the wall of Ophel.

a. **The Tekoites repaired another section:** The section of wall near the Water Gate saw some remarkable service. Apparently, the **Tekoites** weren't satisfied with the significant work they did before - they went on to do even more work. They weren't going to let the bad example of their nobles who did no work (Neh.

3:5) keep them from working above and beyond the call of duty.

8. (28-30) Builders near the Horse Gate.

Beyond the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each in front of his *own* house. After them Zadok the son of Immer made repairs in front of his *own* house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section.

After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs in front of his dwelling.

a. **Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah was**

the keeper of the East Gate: Apparently the gate in front of his house was in good condition, so he pitched in and helped at the **Horse Gate**.

His unselfishness was a great example.

b. **Meshullam the son of Berechiah made**

repairs in front of his dwelling: The Hebrew word for **dwelling** is actually *chamber* - it refers to a singular room.

Meshullam had only one small room, yet he was devoted to God and to the work of rebuilding the walls. It is better to be devoted to God in one small room than to have a mansion and have a heart cold to God.

9. (31-32) Builders near the Miphkad (muster or assembly) Gate.

After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the Nethinim and of the merchants, in front of the Miphkad Gate, and as far as the upper room at the corner. And between the upper room at the corner, as far as the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

B. Observations on Nehemiah 3.

1. This chapter shows the need for believers to work together to accomplish something.

a. It pleased God to see His people working together in one accord, with one heart, with one mind. God will put us into situations where we *must* work together, and learn how to lead, how to follow, how to work together with one heart and mind.

b. The wall was continuous. Any gap compromised the entire structure. Therefore, each space at the wall was important - even if someone did not think so. As well, the wall could never be strong if someone was tearing it down at a different section.

2. The work done was a reflection on the family -

almost everyone mentioned is mentioned as the *son of* someone.

a. It is in the family our children learn how to work, and parents must be committed to teaching their children how to be hard workers.

In a spiritual sense, our hard work - or lack of it - is a reflection on our spiritual family. Each Christian should be a good reflection of their spiritual family.

3. Evidence of Nehemiah's leadership.

a. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he made each man accountable for his work. Each man had a section of wall he was responsible for, and it was known he was responsible for it.

No one wanted it to be seen that they were a poor worker in God's cause.

i. By giving each man a sense of responsibility for the work, they helped ensure the work would be done right. It made each man accountable.

b. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he noted who did the work and who didn't - the list demonstrates this.

c. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he organized the work for maximum efficiency.

Everyone had their section, and the work was organized around the gates - the places most needful of the work.

d. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he knew where to start. He began with the spiritual aspect of the work (the high priest's work is mentioned first), and by consecrating everything to God.

e. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he got both "high" and "low" to join together in doing the work. The leaders and the high priest worked together with the man who lived in a single room.

f. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he was willing to let people try new things -

goldsmiths, priests, and perfumers all because construction workers.

g. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he made people focus on their own house first.

h. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he didn't disqualify people because of a past of sin and compromise.

© 2006 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission **2** The men of Jericho built adjacent to it, and Zaccur son of Imri built adjacent to them.

3 The sons of Hassenaah rebuilt the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and positioned its doors, its bolts, and its bars. **4**

Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakoz, worked on the section adjacent to them. Meshullam son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel worked on the section next to them.

And Zadok son of Baana worked on the section adjacent to them. **5** The men of Tekoa worked on the section adjacent to them, but their town leaders would not assist with the work of their master.

6 Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah worked on the Jeshanah Gate. They laid its beams and positioned its doors, its bolts, and its bars. **7** Adjacent to them worked Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, who were men of Gibeon and Mizpah. These towns were under the jurisdiction of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. **8** Uzziel son of Harhaiah, a member of the goldsmiths' guild, worked on the section adjacent to him. Hananiah, a member of the perfumers' guild, worked on the section adjacent to him. They plastered the city wall of Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. **9** Rephaiah son of Hur, head of a half-district of Jerusalem, worked on the section adjacent to them. **10** Jedaiah son of Harumaph worked on the section adjacent to them opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah worked on the section adjacent to him. **11** Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab worked on another section and the Tower of the Fire Pots. **12** Shallum son of Hallohesh, head of a half-

district of Jerusalem, worked on the section adjacent to him, assisted by his daughters.

13 Hanun and the residents of Zanoah worked on the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and positioned its doors, its bolts, and its bars, in addition to working on fifteen hundred feet of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.

14 Malkijah son of Recab, head of the district of Beth Hakkerem, worked on the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and positioned its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

15 Shallun son of Col-Hozeh, head of the district of Mizpah, worked on the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it, put on its roof, and positioned its doors, its bolts, and its bars. In addition, he rebuilt the wall of the Pool of Siloam, by the royal garden, as far as the steps that go down from the City of David. **16** Nehemiah son of Azbuk, head of a half-district of Beth Zur, worked after him as far as the tombs of David and the artificial pool and the House of the Warriors.

17 After him the Levites worked – Rehum son of Bani and after him Hashabiah, head of half the district of Keilah, for his district. **18** After him their relatives worked – Binnui son of Henadad, head of a half-district of Keilah. **19**

Adjacent to him Ezer son of Jeshua, head of Mizpah, worked on another section, opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. **20** After him Baruch son of Zabbai worked on another section, from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. **21** After him Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, worked on another section from the door of Eliashib's house to the end of it.

22 After him the priests worked, men of the nearby district.

23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub worked opposite their house. After them Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, worked near his house. **24** After him Binnui son of Henadad worked on another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and the corner. **25**

After him Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the buttress and the tower that protrudes from the upper palace of the court

of the guard. After him Pedaiah son of Parosh **26** and the temple servants who were living on Ophel worked up to the area opposite the Water Gate toward the east and the protruding tower. **27** After them the men of Tekoa worked on another section, from opposite the great protruding tower to the wall of Ophel.

28 Above the Horse Gate the priests worked, each in front of his house. **29** After them Zadok son of Immer worked opposite his house, and after him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, guard at the East Gate, worked. **30** After him Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, worked on another section. After them Meshullam son of Berechiah worked opposite his quarters. **31** After him Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, worked as far as the house of the temple servants and the traders, opposite the Inspection Gate, and up to the room above the corner. **32**

And between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and traders worked.

1 (3:33) Now when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall he became angry and was quite upset.

He derided the Jews,

Guzik - Nehemiah 4:1-23

Nehemiah 4 - Enemies Try to Stop the Work

A. Sanballat and Tobiah ridicule the work of God.

1. (1-3) The attempt to discourage the workers.

But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day?

Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish; *stones* that are burned?" Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up *on it*, he will break down their stone wall."

a. **But it so happened, when Sanballat**

heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant: Sanballat and Tobiah were first *deeply disturbed* when they heard a man wanted to help the people of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:10). Then they

used scorn and intimidation to prevent the work from starting (Neh. 2:19). Now that the work had begun, they were **furious and very indignant**.

b. **And mocked the Jews:** The nature of their discouraging attack is evident. They used a mocking, sarcastic tone and **mocked the Jews . . . these feeble Jews . . . will they . . . will they . . . will they . . . even if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall**.

i. **Will they sacrifice** has the idea of, "Will they seek God through sacrifice and expect Him to miraculously build the walls? Will

they pray the walls up?" **Will they**

complete it in a day has the idea of "Do they have any idea what they are taking on?

This isn't an easy project."

ii. Like most attacks of discouragement, there is a trace of truth in the words of the enemy. As builders, the Jews were **feeble**.

They would not **complete it in a day**. They didn't have the best materials to work with.

A lying, discouraging attack will often have *some* truth in it, but it will neglect the great truth: *God was with them and has promised to see them through*.

iii. Sanballat and Tobiah sought to bring the discouragement through criticism. Charles

Swindoll points out that there were many of them together doing the sarcastic, mocking

criticism - and observes "critics run with critics." One measure of a leader is to be able to measure criticism; to not allow one to be run down by the critical, while still be sensitive to God's voice even in the midst of criticism.

iv. Discouragement is such a powerful weapon because it is somewhat the opposite of faith. Where faith believes God and His love and promises, discouragement looks for and believes the worst - and tends to pretty much forget about who God is and what He has promised to do.

c. **He will break down their stone wall:** Tobiah made a huge mistake. He called the wall ***their* stone wall**; it wasn't **their** wall at all, but God's - he was criticizing God's wall, God's work.

i. Critics who bring nothing but discouragement often miss what God is doing; because they don't like the wall, they can't believe it is God's work. In the same way, the church is God's church; Jesus loves His bride. One should always be careful about the way you talk about Jesus' bride.

d. **Furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews:** Because Nehemiah and the workers did in fact have legal protection from the king (proven by the *letters* mentioned in Neh. 2:7), Sanballat and Tobiah had no authority to actually stop the work. All they could do was to discourage the Jews into stopping.

i. The exact same attack comes into the life of the believer who is legally set free by his King. Yet they can be discouraged into drawing back from what God has set before them.

ii. We work differently under faith or under discouragement. We pray differently under faith or under discouragement. We read and hear the word differently under faith or under discouragement. It is no wonder that Satan works so hard to keep us from faith and keep us in discouragement.

iii. *Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the*

saving of the soul. (Heb. 10:38-39) 2. (4-5) Nehemiah comes against the discouraging attack with prayer.

Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked *You* to anger before the builders.

a. **Hear, O our God:** Nehemiah's response was a great example. He didn't debate, he didn't form a committee, he didn't even deal with the two enemies directly. Instead, he took it to God in prayer.

i. For Nehemiah, prayer was a first resource, not a last resort. When times of opposition come, God wants us to rely on Him - and the purest way of expressing our reliance on God is through prayer.

b. **Hear, O our God, for we are despised:** In his prayer, Nehemiah first asked for God's attention and mercy. God did care about Nehemiah and the work of rebuilding, but Nehemiah needed God to *display* it and he also needed to *sense* God's presence and care.

c. **Turn their reproach on their own heads .**

. . . give them as plunder . . . do not cover their iniquity: Nehemiah then asked God to battle their enemies for them. He depended on God to fight the battle. God gave him a work to do, and he would not be distracted from it.

i. This prayer seems pretty tough, but prayers in the Psalms are even tougher:

Breath their teeth in their mouth, O God!

(Psa. 58:6) *Let their dwelling place be desolate; let no one live in their tents* (Psa.

69:25). It is proper for a child of God to pray such a prayer, because they are giving their violent inclinations over to God, and letting *Him* deal with them.

ii. If we are angry and someone or have a real enemy, then we can go at them in

prayer. Never in the sense of praying evil upon them, but in turning them over to a good and just God, because He knows exactly what to do with them.

d. They have provoked You to anger:

Finally, Nehemiah's prayer gave God a reason to show mercy and to come against his enemies.

Nehemiah recognized that this was *God's* cause, not his own.

3. (6) The result after the attack and Nehemiah's defense in prayer: the work continues on with greater and greater strength.

So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

a. **So we built the wall:** God answered the prayer by giving them all **a mind to work**. A **mind to work** is a gift from God, and no significant job will ever be accomplished until people come together with **a mind to work**.

i. This is exactly what Satan wants to destroy with his attacks - the **mind to work**. He wants to make us feel defeated, or passive, or self-focused, or discouraged.

ii. "Critics demoralize. Leaders encourage.

When the critics spoke, the workmen heard them and were demoralized. But when the capable leader stepped up and said, 'Let's look at it God's way, stay at the job,' the crew members were back in

there." (Swindoll)

b. **For the people had a mind to work:** The immediate answer to the prayer made no difference in the enemies. The prayer was answered in the people of God doing the work.

Nehemiah's prayer asked God to take care of his enemies, and God answered by taking care of His people.

i. We often miss God's answer of our

prayers, because we pray for Him to do a work in the lives of others we are in conflict with - and He answers by moving in our lives, but we resist that moving. It is as if He tried to give us **a mind to work** in a situation, but we resisted it.

c. **The entire wall was joined together up to half its height:** The work was half finished.

It was an exciting, but dangerous time; much had been done, but much was left to do.

Fatigue and discouragement were ready to set in, if given an opportunity.

B. Sanballat and Tobiah plan to lead a violent attack against the work.

1. (7-8) The conspiracy to attack the work.

Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come *and* attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

a. **The gaps were beginning to be closed:** The wall was only half as high as it should be, but it was almost continuous now. Therefore, the enemies of the work **became very angry.**

i. It must be that the work of God often makes the enemy of our soul angry. He must often rage against the progress being made by God's people in touching a lost world for Jesus Christ. It's not bad to make the devil angry.

b. **All of them conspired together to come and attack:** As the work progressed the enemies became more serious. Now they didn't simply complain or mock, they threatened and planned for violence.

i. On the one hand, this was serious: the wall was built to protect against the attacks of violence, and now it seemed that the very building of the wall may prompt

an attack to come. It would have been easy for the people to fear and to think perhaps all their work would be made useless.

ii. On the other hand, this wasn't serious at all. We notice that they *didn't attack* - they just talked about it. Sanballat and Tobiah were hoping that the *threat* of attack would be enough. Satan uses the same strategy of fear against us, and if we are paralyzed by a threat the threat has worked - even when

nothing actually happens against us.

c. **And create confusion:** This is an important strategy of Satan - to create confusion among the people of God. A confused people will never move forward and fulfill God's work. They are usually confused because they are distracted by the enemies' tricks instead of focusing on God and His promises.

2. (9) The attack defended by prayer and watching.

Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

a. **Nevertheless we made our prayer to**

God: Nothing would make them stop depending on God through prayer. They might have given up, believing the continued attack was a failure on God's part to answer prayer before - but they had more trust in God than that.

i. God allowed the attack to go on, even

though He could have instantly swept it

away. Yet He allowed it to continue because He was delighted that His people drew

closer to Him with a deeper trust than ever before. God did His perfect work *both* in building the walls and His people.

b. **We set a watch:** They also knew that prayer didn't mean they were to do *nothing*.

They used sanctified common sense to do what they should have, protecting against attack, using willing servants of God to *be* the wall until the wall was built.

i. It isn't hard to imagine some super-spiritual among them saying, "Now Nehemiah, we don't need to **set a watch**.

We have prayed, and God will protect us."

Nehemiah would likely respond, "Yes, God will protect us, and He will as He finds us doing our duty before Him. Set the guard."

ii. When we see an area of our Christian life that needs particular attention, it isn't enough to pray. You need to set a watch as well - give special attention and accountability to that area of your life until you are walking in consistent victory.

iii. Our prayers do not replace our actions; they make our actions effective for God's work.

c. **Day and night:** This shows that Nehemiah was determined. He wouldn't let the security of daylight or the sleepiness of night keep him from the work. This sent a powerful message.

i. It sent a message to the people of God saying, "We are committed. This is going to succeed, because God is with us, and will enable us to overcome every obstacle."

ii. It sent a message to the enemies saying, "You will not succeed. God's work is going on, and will not be stopped. We will make whatever sacrifices necessary to see it done - weary days, sleepless nights, it doesn't matter."

iii. It sent a message to God: "We trust in You, and our faith is a living faith - a faith of actions, not just words. We love and trust You, LORD."

C. Challenges from the inside and the outside.

1. (10) The challenge from the inside:

discouragement among the people because the work seemed too big.

Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and *there is* so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

a. **Then Judah said:** Judah was supposed to be the strongest, bravest tribe. It was the tribe of great kings and ultimately, the Messiah Himself. It was a special challenge and a

discouragement to have this word come from the tribe of Judah.

i. Nehemiah and the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem have been standing strong in the face of attack; but now that the rebuilding work is at the half-way point, and wall is almost continuous, special challenges arise.

b. **The strength of the laborers is failing:** The half-way point (mentioned in Neh. 4:6) is a dangerous place. Much remains to be done, but fatigue sets in because much has already been done.

i. It isn't enough to just begin well. Many a team has had a great first half - only to lose in the final minutes. The rebuilding work has gone very well and many obstacles have been overcome - but the job isn't done yet, the game isn't over yet, there is still time to lose.

c. **There is so much rubbish:** The work of rebuilding the walls was not only construction, but cleaning and hauling away the rubbish. The ruins of the walls, lying in waste for 100 years had become a collecting point for all kinds of rubbish.

i. Clearing away the rubbish was not an option - it had to be done. The destroyed parts of the wall and the accumulated rubbish had to be cleared away so the walls could be rebuilt upon their foundations. If they didn't do this, the walls wouldn't stand at all.

ii. In our Christian life, nothing much can be built for God's glory unless rubbish is swept away as well. Taking out the garbage can be discouraging work - but it must be done.

e. **We are not able to build the wall:** So the excavation work had to start. Before they could build the walls up, they had to tear down and clear away the rubbish. They had to go down before they could go up.

i. It was difficult because often, the work of building is a lot easier - or more fun - than clearing away the rubbish.

ii. It was difficult because as the mound of rubbish was torn down, the city was even

more vulnerable than before. We can see some thinking, "Don't take away the rubbish; our enemies are near and you merely clear a path for them to come in."

iii. It was difficult because there have always been those who will defend any heap of

rubbish, no matter how useless it is. "Well, my grandfather had that pile of rubbish, and if it was good enough for him, it is good enough for us!" This is bad thinking; we should clear away the old, so we can build

on the true foundation.

iv. The heart of the people as shown in verse 10 must have been a discouragement for Nehemiah; it's easy to lead when your followers are full of enthusiasm and have a heart to work. But what do you do when that begins to fade?

2. (11) The challenge from the outside: the enemies plan a surprise attack.

And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease."

a. **And our adversaries said:** Verse ten may mark the lowest point in the spirits of those doing the work. Things were already in a bad state, and the discouraged workers

felt like giving up. *Now*, the enemy planned its raid on the workers, to crush those rebuilding the walls.

b. They will neither know nor see

anything: It is doubtful these enemies knew exactly how discouraged the people of God

were. But certainly, the counsels of spiritual darkness in high places knew - and the attack was planned.

i. We can almost imagine the spiritual ranks of darkness suggesting to the adversaries of God's people: "Now! Now is the time to attack! Do not delay, and you will crush them!"

They knew Israel's state of discouragement made an evil victory possible.

ii. The attacks we suffer from spiritual forces of darkness are just as strategically timed.

Our spiritual enemies know when we are discouraged, tired, angry, or proud in self-confidence.

c. They will neither know nor see

anything: Often, attacks from the adversary are successful only if they come as a surprise.

When God's people are on guard, the enemy sees little victory.

d. Kill them and cause the work to cease: The enemies of God's people paid a back-handed compliment by saying this. They knew by now the only way to get them to stop serving God and doing His work was to **kill them**.

i. This cannot be said of every servant of God today. For many, the devil does not have to kill them because discouragement, compromise, money, relationships, frustration, or trouble get them to stop serving God.

3. (12) God allows the Jews to be warned about the coming attack.

So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, *they*

will be upon us."

a. **The Jews who dwelt near them came:** This is a wonderful example of the power and goodness of God. The enemies of God and His people did their best, but God was always in control. The enemies did not know there were faithful Jews listening to their plotting.

b. **They told us ten times:** It is easy to picture this scene, and see the informants

repeating over and over again, "An attack is coming! It's for real! They will defeat us!" **From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us!**

i. These who overheard the plan didn't have the wisdom to know what to do in response.

They were in a panic, and they were probably troubled that Nehemiah didn't also panic.

4. (13-14) Nehemiah organizes the defense.

Therefore I positioned *men* behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

a. **Therefore:** These verses tell us what Nehemiah did, but we can also think of what Nehemiah *could* have done in this situation.

i. He could have done *nothing* - and even been spiritual about it. "Well brother, we're just trusting in the Lord. We prayed about it, and believe the Lord will deliver us somehow."

ii. He could have *panicked* - and started thinking it was his job alone to defend against the attack.

iii. What he did was to *wisely and calmly trust God* in the midst of the storm, and to do the concrete things God would

have him do to obtain the victory.

b. **Their swords, their spears, and their bows:** Nehemiah commanded them to bring out their armor. It was time to get serious, to put on the full armor, and to get ready to fight with every resource they had.

c. **Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, great and awesome:** Nehemiah put their mind in the right perspective. The challenge was great but there was no reason for fear. He who was *in them* was greater than he who was in the world.

d. **Fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses:** Nehemiah reminded them what they were fighting for. We fight most effectively for the Lord when we keep in mind how much there is to lose.

5. (15) The enemies shrink back.

And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and *that* God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.

a. **When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing:** Once they saw the defenses of the people of God, the enemies shrunk back. They didn't want a battle because they knew they would lose. What the enemies wanted was for the people of God to hand them the victory on a silver platter through failing to watch and be ready.

b. **All of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work:** *This* was the victory. Defending against the attack was not the victory; the people of God would not be at peace and security until the wall was rebuilt. Getting on with the work was the victory.

i. When we are under spiritual attack it is easy to feel that just enduring the storm is the victory. It isn't. The attack often comes to prevent your *progress and work* for the LORD. Victory is enduring the attack *and* continuing the progress and work for the LORD.

6. (16-18) The sword and the trowel.

So it was, from that time on, *that* half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and *wore* armor; and the leaders *were* behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet *was* beside me.

a. **So that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a**

weapon: Some of the servants did the work of defending and some did the work of building.

The workers had a sword at their side and a trowel in their hands to get the work done. The kingdom of God is built with both a sword and a trowel, a sword to come against every spiritual force of wickedness in high places, and trowel to do the work of building up the people of God.

7. (19-23) Plans are made to keep a ready defense.

Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work *is* great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." So we labored in the work, and half of *the men* held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day." So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, *except* that everyone took them off for washing.

a. **The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another:** Nehemiah knew they had to keep in

communication if the work was going to be

done. The trumpets were a new way of communication there to meet the challenge.

b. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there: They stayed ready to sound the alarm at the slightest notice. They would not be caught off guard.

c. From daybreak until the stars appeared: They dedicated themselves to the work all the more, working hard from sunrise to past dark, even spending the night out at the job site to protect against attack.

d. So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes: They kept their clothes on all the time because they did not want to be caught unprepared. They were always ready to respond to the blast of a trumpet.

i. Christians need to be armed with the same attitude today. They need to be always

ready, always clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, always wearing the armor of God, ready for that final trumpet blast that will gather us together with our LORD.

© 2006 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission **2** and in the presence of his colleagues and the army of Samaria he said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they be left to themselves? Will they again offer sacrifice?

Will they finish this in a day? Can they bring these burnt stones to life again from piles of dust?"

3 Then Tobiah the Ammonite, who was close by, said, "If even a fox were to climb up on what they are building, it would break down their wall of stones!"

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised! Return their reproach on their own head! Reduce them to plunder in a land of exile! **5** Do not cover their iniquity, and do not wipe out their sin from before them. For they have bitterly offended the builders!

6 So we rebuilt the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height. The people were enthusiastic in their work.

7 (4:1) When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the people of Ashdod heard that the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem had moved ahead and that the breaches had begun to be closed, they were very angry. **8** All of them conspired together to move with armed forces against Jerusalem and to create a disturbance in it. **9** So we prayed to our God and stationed a guard to protect against them both day and night. **10**

Then those in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers has failed! The debris is so great that we are unable to rebuild the wall."

11 Our adversaries also boasted, "Before they are aware or anticipate anything, we will come in among them and kill them, and we will bring this work to a halt!"

12 So it happened that the Jews who were living near them came and warned us repeatedly about all the schemes they were plotting against us.

13 So I stationed people at the lower places behind the wall in the exposed places. I stationed the people by families, with their swords, spears, and bows. **14** When I had made an inspection, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the great and awesome Lord, and fight on behalf of your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your families!"

15 It so happened that when our adversaries heard that we were aware of these matters, God frustrated their intentions. Then all of us returned to the wall, each to his own work. **16** From that day forward, half of my men were doing the work and half of them were taking up spears, shields, bows, and body armor. Now the officers were behind all the people of Judah **17** who were rebuilding the wall. Those who were carrying loads did so by keeping one hand on the work and

the other on their weapon. **18** The builders to a man had their swords strapped to their sides while they were building. But the trumpeter remained with me.

19 I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "The work is demanding and extensive, and we are spread out on the wall, far removed from one another.

20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, gather there with us. Our God will fight for us!"

21 So we worked on, with half holding spears, from dawn till dusk. **22** At that time I instructed the people, "Let every man and his coworker spend the night in Jerusalem and let them be guards for us by night and workers by day. **23** We did not change clothes – not I, nor my relatives, nor my workers, nor the watchmen who were with me. Each had his weapon, even when getting a drink of water.

1 Then there was a great outcry from the people and their wives against their fellow Jews.

Guzik - Nehemiah 5:1-19

Nehemiah 5 - The Work Is Threatened Internally

A. Financial problems threaten the work.

1. (1) A **great outcry of the people** stops the work of rebuilding the wall.

And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.

a. **And there was:** Chapter four ended on a note of great victory. The people of God were doing the work of God, and they did it despite all obstacles. They worked with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other, and they would not let their enemies stop them. But in this section of chapter five, there is no mention of working on the wall, indicting that the work had stopped.

b. **Against their Jewish brethren:** The work stopped because of *strife among God's people*.

The enemy could not stop the work of God by direct attack, but the work stopped when God's people weren't unified and working together.

i. **A great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren** meant one group fought against another.

When God's people fight one another they certainly are neither fighting the real enemy nor getting God's work done.

2. (2-5) The reason for strife among God's people: money problems.

For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters *are* many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live." There were also *some* who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine." There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax *on* our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh *is* as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and *some* of our daughters have been brought into slavery. *It is* not in our power *to redeem them*, for other men have our lands and vineyards."

a. **We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live:** Nehemiah is not primarily a book about money; it is a book about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and bringing God's people into a place of peace, security, and blessing. Yet money problems directly affected the rebuilding work.

i. Most the time money problems affect a building project because there isn't enough money to do the work. But the job of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem seems to have been paid for by the king of Persia, who provided the necessary building materials for Nehemiah (Neh. 1:8) and sent him with royal guards (Neh. 1:9).

ii. Nehemiah's money problems were

different; they were money problems among the people that harmed the unity among the people of God.

b. **Let us get grain for them, that we may eat:** People had money problems because they worked hard on the walls and did not spend the same time on providing for the needs of their household.

i. If you want to spend much time directly ministering to the needs of God's people and in spreading the gospel, in most cases it will affect your ability to provide. Ministry takes time, and time spent on ministry is time you aren't making money. If one gets to the place where the ministry is your way of making a living, one should be used to not making a lot of money - or the transition will be rather difficult.

c. **Because of the famine:** People had money problems because there was a famine, which made food more expensive. It was so expensive that some mortgaged their property to provide food.

i. A famine is no one's fault; many of the financial problems people face are really not the fault of anyone. Yet there may be fault in how the problems are addressed.

d. **For the king's tax:** People had money problems because the government kept taxing them even though they weren't working as much and even though the cost of living went up.

i. These taxes were not the fault of those who were hurt by them. Neither Nehemiah nor the people acted as if these taxes were unfair, yet they were still a hardship.

e. **We have borrowed money . . . indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves:** People had financial problems because the loans

they had taken out to live cost interest, and some were in default.

Therefore some had to give their children as servants to their lenders to pay off the debt.

i. As will be indicated later (Neh. 5:11, *the hundredth part*), the rich were taking advantage of the crisis to make money off the poor, charging 12% interest a year.

ii. It isn't unusual for money problems to create strife and completely disrupt what God wants to do. If Nehemiah and his people did not find a way to do what God wanted them to do with their money and money problems, the work of God would be stopped - without a single arrow being fired by the enemies of God.

ii. We sometimes want to separate what we do with our money from our walk with God.

This is a huge deception from Satan. Buying a house is a spiritual decision, not just a financial one. Taking a job, choosing a career, deciding how much money you should make - all these are matters that will directly affect your walk with God, both now and in the future.

iii. If we don't handle our money with the right heart, and make financial decisions with an eye to eternity, we can make mistakes that will affect the work of God in our lives for years and years.

iv. Essential to handling our money with the right heart before God is being a giver.

Being a giver to the work of the Lord helps us always remember that God and His kingdom come first. The New Testament tells us our giving should be regular, thoughtful, proportional, and private (1Co. 16:1-4); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9).

v. Money problems are rarely only money problems. We often think if we just had more money, our money problems would go away. It isn't true - and that's a proven fact, just by looking at the lives of many of those that win a lottery or come into unexpected riches. If they had money problems before - if they didn't know how to handle their money, and glorify God with it - they won't know after. The same problems will soon show up again, often times bigger than ever.

3. (6) Nehemiah's immediate reaction: anger. And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

a. **And I became very angry:** Nehemiah became angry because these money problems were caused, in part, because of the greed of those who wanted to make a profit off of the money troubles of others, something Moses' law clearly said was wrong (Exo. 22:25).

b. **I became very angry when I heard their outcry:** Nehemiah became angry because these money problems led to a lack of unity among the people of God. This unity that was more precious than any amount of money.

c. **I heard their outcry and these words:** No mention was made of the work on the walls.

Nehemiah got angry because these money problems stopped the work of the LORD in rebuilding the walls. It must have frustrated him that they could stand so strong against an enemy, but fall so quickly to these kinds of problems.

4. (7-11) Nehemiah's wise response: confronting those who were in the wrong.

After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called a great assembly against them. And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations.

Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing *to say*. Then I said, "What you are doing *is* not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? I also, *with* my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury!

Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them."

a. **After serious thought:** This was great leadership from Nehemiah. He was a man passionate enough to get angry; but wise enough to not act until he had considered the matter carefully.

b. **I rebuked the nobles and the rulers:** Nehemiah was no coward. When people were in the wrong, he confronted them. He told the truth, and from the result (Neh. 5:12-13), we can judge that he must have told the truth in love.

i. Nehemiah teaches us that the way a leader should approach problems is head on.

c. **Each of you is exacting usury from his brother:** Usury is interest that is either too high or should not be charged at all. The Bible says it is wrong to make money off of someone's financial need; if someone needs money for the most basic needs of life, they should be given money, not loaned it at interest.

i. Of course, loaning money at interest is permitted for things that are not absolute necessities. Yet God's people must always use great wisdom and self-control in borrowing money.

d. **We have redeemed our Jewish**

brethren: Nehemiah noted that when Judah was conquered, many Jews were sold as slaves to foreigners and

many of them had been bought out of slavery by other Jews. Because of this, it was very wrong to have Jews being sold into slavery to other Jews because they couldn't pay off high-interest loans.

e. **Should you not walk in the fear of our God?** This is where many business deals go wrong before God, because there is no regard for God's will or wisdom. The only concern is if a deal can be made, and if money will come from it; not if it is right or wrong.

f. **Restore now to them, even this day:** Nehemiah was not asking the nobles and the rulers to just feel bad, or to just stop what they were doing; they had to set the wrong they had done right. If money had been charged unfairly or collateral was taken unfairly, it had to be set right.

5. (12-13) The response of the rulers and nobles who had done wrong.

So they said, "We will restore *it*, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say." Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD.

Then the people did according to this promise.

a. **We will restore it:** This was good.

Nehemiah wisely told the truth in love, confronting these brothers; and they received the rebuke, doing the right thing and admitting they had been wrong.

i. Their teachable, correctable spirit was impressive; too few are willing to admit they are wrong and to do what is right - especially if money is involved.

b. **So may God shake out each man . . . who does not perform this promise:**

Nehemiah wisely knew their words were not enough. Their actions had to be followed through with real action - and it was: **the people did according to this promise.**

i. With the oaths, and public record of all this, Nehemiah assures accountability -

something we often need to help us do what our spirit is willing to do, but our flesh is weak to do! Perhaps accountability is a missing step in dealing with an area where *you* are having a hard time doing what is right.

B. Nehemiah's godly example.

1. (14-16) Nehemiah did not tax the people.

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. But the former governors who *were* before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver.

Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants *were* gathered there for the work.

a. **Neither I nor my brothers ate the**

governor's provisions: Nehemiah was a great example of putting the work of God ahead of his own personal interest. He certainly had the right to tax the people for his support (others had done it before him), but he didn't take that right because it wouldn't help the work of God.

i. The apostle Paul is another great example of someone who had the right to be

supported, but didn't take that right because it was better for the cause of the gospel

(1Co. 9:1-15).

ii. Should ministers be supported today? It is all a question of what is better for the cause of the gospel. If it is better for a minister to be able to devote himself full time to the care and teaching of God's people, he should be supported. If it is better for him not to be supported that way, he shouldn't. There's something wrong with a minister who will only minister to God's people if the money is right.

b. **Because of the fear of God:** Nehemiah did what was right before God, not what was "right" for his own cares and concerns - because he knew he would have to answer to God.

c. **I did not do so, because of the fear of God:** Nehemiah could say this because it didn't matter to him what others did, how the crowd acted, what the rest of the world thought. He lived by another standard. We should have even better standard than Nehemiah did, and we should say, when confronted by the sin this world takes for granted, *I did not do so, because of the love of Jesus.*

2. (17-18) Nehemiah's example of generosity.

And at my table *were* one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. Now *that* which was prepared daily *was* one ox *and* six choice sheep.

Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people.

a. **And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers:** Nehemiah not only did not take when he could have; he also gave when he didn't have to. He received a lot of food from the king's provisions, which he could have sold for his own profit. Instead, he gave them away to be the example of generosity - feeding as many as 150 people regularly.

b. **Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions:** Nehemiah could have taken more (**the governor's provisions**), but he didn't. Therefore, Nehemiah was an example for what he did not take and for what he did not keep.

c. **Because the bondage was heavy on this people:** Nehemiah, in his own life, lived the way he told the nobles and rulers to live - to not take personal advantage of another's need. He did what every godly leader must do: he never expected more of his followers than he expected of himself.

3. (19) Nehemiah's prayer, asking God to remember his good deeds.

Remember me, my God, for good, *according to* all that I have done for this people.

a. **Remember me, my God:** Some think that Nehemiah was wrong for saying all the good things he did. Jesus clearly taught us that our good works must not be done to show others how spiritual we are.

i. Mat. 6:1-4: *Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

b. **Remember me, my God, for good:** But in his prayer, Nehemiah did not look for praise from man - but from God. In fact, Nehemiah probably originally intended that no one else see all or part of this book, because it was written as a diary.

i. In our own private time with the LORD, it is entirely appropriate - and right - to say,
" *Remember me, my God, for good*" - to have confidence in our heavenly reward, instead of the praise of men.

c. **According to all that I have done for this people:**
We should be glad that God took this personal diary of Nehemiah and gave it to us. It shows us that a leader must first lead by example, and that Nehemiah could tell other to do what was right here because his own walk was right. His public words and private actions said the same thing.

© 2006 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission **2** There were those who said, "With our sons and daughters, we are many. We must obtain grain in order to eat and stay alive." **3** There were others who said, "We are putting up our fields, our vineyards, and our houses as collateral in order to obtain grain during the famine." **4**

Then there were those who said, "We have borrowed money to pay our taxes to the king on our fields and our vineyards. **5** And now, though we share the same flesh and blood as our fellow countrymen, and our children are just like their children, still we have found it necessary to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have been subjected to slavery, while we are powerless to help, since our fields and vineyards now belong to other people."

6 I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints. **7** I considered these things carefully and then registered a complaint with the wealthy and the officials. I said to them, "Each one of you is seizing the collateral from your own countrymen!" Because of them I called for a great public assembly. **8** I said to them, "To the extent possible we have bought back our fellow Jews who had been sold to the Gentiles. But now you yourselves want to sell your own countrymen, so that we can then buy them back!" They were utterly silent, and could find nothing to say.

9 Then I said, "The thing that you are doing is wrong!

Should you not conduct yourselves in the fear of our God in order to avoid the reproach of the Gentiles who are our enemies? **10** Even I and my relatives and my associates are lending them money and grain. But let us abandon this practice of seizing collateral! **11** This very day return to them their fields, their vineyards, their olive trees, and their houses, along with the interest that you are exacting from them on the money, the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil.”

12 They replied, “We will return these things, and we will no longer demand anything from them. We will do just as you say.” Then I called the priests and made the wealthy and the officials swear to do what had been promised. **13** I also shook out my garment, and I said, “In this way may God shake out from his house and his property every person who does not carry out this matter.

In this way may he be shaken out and emptied!” All the assembly replied, “So be it!” and they praised the LORD. Then the people did as they had promised.

14 From the day that I was appointed governor in the land of Judah, that is, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes – twelve years in all – neither I nor my relatives ate the food allotted to the governor. **15** But the former governors who preceded me had burdened the people and had taken food and wine from them, in addition to forty shekels of silver. Their associates were also domineering over the people. But I did not behave in this way, due to my fear of God. **16** I gave myself to the work on this wall, without even purchasing a field. All my associates were gathered there for the work.

17 There were 150 Jews and officials who dined with me routinely, in addition to those who came to us from the nations all around us. **18** Every day one ox, six select sheep, and some birds were prepared for me, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Despite all this I did not require

the food allotted to the governor, for the work was demanding on this people.

19 Please remember me for good, O my God, for all that I have done for this people.

1 When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and no breach remained in it (even though up to that time I had not positioned doors in the gates), Guzik - Nehemiah 6:1-19

Nehemiah 6 - The Walls Completed

A. Nehemiah is attacked in three phases.

1. (1-4) The snare of the enemy's friendship.

Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

a. **Our enemies heard that I had rebuilt**

the wall: The wall was almost finished - the gaps were closed, but the gates were not yet finished. For the enemies of Nehemiah and the work of God, this was a "now-or-never" time. If they didn't do something immediately to stop the work, the walls will be completely finished.

b. **Come, let us meet together among the**

villages in the plain of Ono: At this time, Sanballat and Geshem tried to arrange a meeting with Nehemiah - by appearances, a friendly meeting, perhaps even a reconciliation or a vacation. Their invitation may have had the sense of a break for a few days of rest and relaxation out on the plain of Ono.

c. But they thought to do me harm:

Nehemiah was equipped to see through the outward appearance, and to understand what Sanballat's friendly offer was all about.

i. "Whether you be a pastor or a teacher or evangelist or Sunday school leader, or whatever your position may be in Christian leadership, let me say that there will always be those who are friendly to your face, but you plan your downfall behind your back.

Beware of the fawning, flattering Christian who is always fluttering around you, and who behind your back will be the first to rejoice when you go down." (Redpath)

d. But they thought to do me harm:

Nehemiah was equipped with *discernment*.

i. Discernment is the ability to judge matters according to God's view of them, and not according to their outward appearance. We are often deceived by outward appearances; *For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

(1Sa. 16:7).

ii. Many people confuse being discerning with being negative or cynical; but discernment is just as able to see the good where other might miss it as it is at seeing bad where others might see good according to the outward appearance.

iii. Christians today suffer a great deal because they lack discernment. They follow leaders and teachers who give a good appearance, but don't walk in the nature of Jesus. They accept things blindly because it looks good or sounds good, without carefully judging it against the whole counsel of

God's Word. We might even picture Nehemiah going to the Word of God, and equipping himself with discernment. Perhaps he read Pro. 27:6: *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*. That passage alone would remind him to not look to outward appearances, but to judge soberly.

iv. How can we develop discernment? First, if you want to see things as God sees them, get to know His Word. Second, discernment comes through spiritual maturity; Heb. 5:12-14 says that discernment is something spiritual babies don't have (a baby will stick *anything* in his mouth). Third, discernment can be given as a gift from the Holy Spirit (1Co. 12:10). Seek Him for it.

v. Without discernment, we can think a dangerous invitation from an enemy is really an offer of reconciliation. We can think presumption is faith. We can think our own noble desires are God's promises. We can think God is saying "now" or "later" when He is really saying "later" or "now." We can think someone is a great guy or a spiritual leader when they are really doing damage to God's people.

e. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you? Nehemiah, using discernment will not only escape their trap; he won't even be distracted from his work.

i. If the enemy can *distract* God's people, then he has won; if we can start majoring on minors, and minoring on majors, we've lost our effectiveness for the work of the LORD.

ii. Nehemiah was *persistent* in his discernment; the request came four times, and each time Nehemiah stood fast and

didn't fall for it.

f. I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?

Discernment gave Nehemiah *focus*; he knew what God wanted him to be doing and he did it.

He wouldn't be sidetracked by things that sounded good, but weren't of the LORD for him.

i. Anyone doing a work for God must contend with a hundred different noble causes, and a hundred things that might look good - and be good - but they are not what they are called to do at that time.

Discernment gives us focus.

2. (5-9) The subtlety of the enemy's slander.

Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. In it *was* written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, *that* you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, '*There is* a king in Judah!' Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together. Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart."

For they all *were trying to* make us afraid, saying,

"Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, *O God*, strengthen my hands.

a. It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says: Sanballat's slander began the way many verbal attacks do, as a report of what others have reportedly said.

i. Vague accusations often sound like

"Everyone is talking about" or, "A number of people are saying." Such vague words can very easily give the wrong impression.

ii. What Sanballat accused Nehemiah of was *false*. If a thousand nations reported it, it would not make it true. A popular lie may be more dangerous, but it is not more true because it is popular.

b. The Jews plan to rebel . . . that you may be their king . . . you have also appointed prophets to proclaim:

These lies probably outraged Nehemiah. He had worked hard and trusted God greatly so this work would be done with the blessing of the king; and he had embraced great personal sacrifice to demonstrate that he was not in this for himself.

And Nehemiah would never dream of going to "rent a prophet"! Now he is accused of the very things he has worked so hard to not fall into!

i. We may as well accept it: the devil knows our hot buttons. He knows those lies, those accusations, which really get to you - and he knows how to throw them in your face. We can't stop it, so we have to learn how to deal with it!

c. These matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together. Now Sanballat made a plain threat. Nehemiah wouldn't be deceived into coming to this meeting (he had too much discernment for that); so now he tried slander against Nehemiah.

d. You invent them in your own heart: Nehemiah replied by calmly and straightforwardly telling Sanballat that he was a liar, and by carrying on with the work.

i. Nehemiah did not mount an elaborate defense, trying to prove Sanballat wrong point by point. He wasn't going to waste his time. You don't satisfy men like Sanballat with facts, explanations, and evidence. You satisfy them by giving in to their demands, and Nehemiah would not!

ii. Sanballat would not be defeated by being told he was a liar. He didn't care if the whole world thought he was a liar, *if he could only cause the work would stop*. But Nehemiah was steadfast!

e. **They are trying to make us afraid:** Nehemiah had the discernment to see the

slander strategy was all about fear, and he wouldn't give into it. No enemy can make us afraid; all they can do is try to make us choose fear - but it is up to us to choose it.

i. Many people live paralyzed by the fear of what others are saying about them, or what

they might say about them. Instead, we should forget about it in these situations.

People will talk anyway and there is little you can do about it, other than be determined

that you will *not* make you afraid.

ii. One of Benjamin Franklin's proverbs from *Poor Richard's Almanac* wisely says: "Since I cannot govern my own tongue, tho' within my own teeth, how can I hope to govern the

tongues of others?"

iii. "No man can lead a work of God if he allows himself to be governed by what other people think. He is to secure help, fellowship, prayer, advice, and he is foolish not to take it; but if his ultimate decisions are based on popular opinion he is going to fail." (Redpath) f. **Now therefore, O God,**

strengthen my

hands: We must do what Nehemiah did - pray for God's strength, His power in our lives. We can overcome the slander and fear of our enemies in our own strength. It will be said, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God.

3. (10-14) The scandal of the enemy's religion.

Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who *was* a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple,

for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who *is there* such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced *this* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he *was* hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so *that* they might have *cause* for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

a. Afterward I came to the house of

Shemaiah: This man **Shemaiah** was said to be a prophet (**he pronounced this prophecy**), but he was not. Shemaiah offered Nehemiah a safe haven in the temple. The idea was that though Nehemiah was said to be threatened, he could find refuge in the temple.

i. It sure sounds reasonable - and one might even take some Scripture to support it: Psa.

61:4 says, *I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.* Nehemiah needed discernment now more than ever.

b. Should a man such as I flee? Nehemiah, knowing the heart of God as it is revealed in the whole counsel of God's Word, had discernment.

Shemaiah tried to create fear in Nehemiah, and tried to get him to disobey God based on this fear.

i. Only priests were allowed in the temple, and Nehemiah was not a priest. He would

have been disobeying God if he had done what Shemaiah suggested. In 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah - who was not a priest - went into the temple, and God instantly struck him with leprosy.

ii. "He seeks to persuade Nehemiah into an easy-going, compromising religion that will shirk persecution, that will carry no cross, and that is governed by fear of the opinions of other people." (Redpath) c. **Let us meet together in the house of**

God: Shemaiah knew how to use religious talk, but it was still a trap. If Nehemiah believed Shemaiah's religious talk, he would sin and gives others something to find fault with and discredit him with.

d. **And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!** Nehemiah stood brave against this religious deception. In his commitment to obedience, God revealed to him the heart of Shemaiah - who was no true prophet. Instead, he was on Sanballat's payroll.

e. **My God, remember Tobiah and**

Sanballat: Best of all, instead of lashing out against Shemaiah and his fellow false-religionists, he simply committed these wicked men - and the situation - to God. If God could take good care of Nehemiah, then He could take also take care of Shemaiah according to divine wisdom.

i. Nehemiah's response to the three-fold attack of pretended friendship, slander, and false religion makes us admire him as a leader. But we can love and admire Jesus far more.

ii. "Come down to the plain of Ono," they said to Nehemiah. But they said to Jesus,

"come down from the cross." But Jesus was doing a great work - the greatest work - on the cross, and would not be stopped.

ii. They slandered Nehemiah, but he didn't defend Himself. He spoke the truth and trusted in God. Jesus was also slandered, and did not debate His critics - He spoke the truth and trusted in His Father in heaven.

iii. A false prophet offered Nehemiah an easy way out - but it was a way of fear and disobedience. Nehemiah would have none of it. Jesus was also offered a way out of the cross from Satan - just worship Satan, and all the kingdoms of the world would be delivered to Him. But Jesus would have none of it.

B. Completion of the wall.

1. (15-16) The wall is completed in 52 days.

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth *day* of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations around us saw *these things*, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.

a. **So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days:** The amount of time it took to finish the job was remarkably short. The walls were in ruins for more than 100 years, and then they were set right in a period of only 52 days.

i. Why wasn't the job done in the more than 100 years before? It wasn't that no one saw the problem; it wasn't that walls were not wanted. Many people saw broken walls, knew how they ruined the lives of the people of Jerusalem, but no one got past the place of just *wishing* there were walls.

ii. Finally, there came a man who did more than wish Jerusalem had walls; he grieved, he ached, he prayed, he planned, he asked boldly, he went, he fought, he encouraged, he stood strong, he saw the job through to completion. But he also had people around him with the same kind of heart.

iii. We have such small ideas of how God can use us. God used a man named Nehemiah to set right a 100-year-old problem in less and two months - and the same God sits on

a throne in heaven and works through you today.

b. **In fifty-two days:** At the beginning, when he saw the need, Nehemiah prayed for four months (the difference in time between Neh. 1:1 and 2:1). But the work itself took less than two months. Nehemiah worked longer in prayer than they needed to work to do the job.

i. This shows the spiritual battle was actually greater than the material battle. We are often told this, but it can be hard to believe!

c. **And all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes:** When the wall was finished, their enemies **were very disheartened**. It is a glorious thing to dishearten the enemies of God's people and to let them be discouraged for a while.

i. The battles were hard; the work was big; there were challenges from within and without. But the job was now finished, and victory was sweet.

d. **They perceived that this work was done by our God:** Their enemies were disheartened not just because the wall was finished, but especially because it was evident that God did the work. When something has the fingerprints of God on it, all our enemies notice it also.

i. The enemy is *only* disheartened when God does the work. If it is the product of man's efforts, they just laugh. Men might be fooled, and see a work of man and be impressed, but angel in heaven and every demon in hell know what has been done by man and what has been done by God.

ii. A strong, secure people of Jerusalem were a witness to surrounding nations. Many of us live Christian lives that no one takes notice of, because our walls are broken down. Let the LORD do a building work, and others will notice.

2. (17-19) The work is finished despite some who were friends with the enemy Tobiah.

Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and *the letters of Tobiah* came to them. For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

a. **Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah:** Tobiah was the man who had opposed the rebuilding work with Sanballat. In Neh. 2:10 he was disturbed that Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls. In Neh. 2:19 and 4:3 he mocked Nehemiah's work. In

Neh. 4:7 he was angry that the work was being done. In Neh. 6:1 he was one of the men who tried to get Nehemiah to stop the work, and come to the plain of Ono where he could be attacked.

b. **For many in Judah were pledged to him:** Yet, the **nobles of Judah** had no trouble being friends to such a man - because he had family ties to many in the tribe of Judah. In fact, they tried to recommend him to Nehemiah (**they reported his good deeds before me**).

i. These Jewish brothers of Nehemiah could not see what was so plain to Nehemiah.

Perhaps they did not see much of the evil work of Tobiah first-hand, so they had a hard time believing it. We imagine them saying, "He's always been nice to us; look at all the good he has done."

ii. It is also possible they just didn't have the shepherd's heart, and shepherd's eyes

Nehemiah had. Nehemiah was called of God to protect God's people and God's work; he was watching and on guard in a way that

others were not.

iii. Also, in the case of these nobles, there was self-interest at work. They had financial dealings with Tobiah they wanted to protect.

"His numerous binding agreements (**pledged to him**) within the Jewish community were probably trading contracts, facilitated by marriage connections." (Kidner)

c. **They reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him:**

Undoubtedly, they saw Nehemiah as the bad guy. They figured Tobiah's deeds were good, and Nehemiah spoke some strong words against Tobiah (in Neh. 4:4, Nehemiah prays the evil Tobiah planned be turned back upon him, and that he be captured and carried away).

i. Nehemiah had to be willing to be seen as the bad guy in order to do what is right by the people of God. He could see what the nobles of Judah could not. He knew that Tobiah's **good deeds** were not the whole story - all the while, Tobiah was sending frightening letters to Nehemiah. Those letter were not one of Tobiah's good deeds.

ii. "Tobiah's friends acted as a Fifth Column.

They attempted both to propagandize on behalf of Tobiah and to act as an intelligence system for him. Tobiah himself kept on

trying to frighten Nehemiah." (Yamauchi) d. **Tobiah sent letters to frighten me:** Nehemiah wrote no more about this situation.

He wasn't going to demand the nobles change their minds about Tobiah; but he wasn't going to deny what he knew to be true about Tobiah either. He seems willing to let it go and let God take care of it.

i. Nehemiah had a work to do, and that work was not really going out to attack people like Tobiah. He could leave the

Tobiahs alone, as long as they weren't attacking the work of God.

© 2006 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission **2** Sanballat and Geshem sent word to me saying, "Come on! Let's set up a time to meet together at Kephirim in the plain of Ono." Now they intended to do me harm.

3 So I sent messengers to them saying, "I am engaged in an important work, and I am unable to come down.

Why should the work come to a halt when I leave it to come down to you?" **4** They contacted me four times in this way, and I responded the same way each time. **5** The fifth time that Sanballat sent his assistant to me in this way, he had an open letter in his hand. **6** Written in it were the following words: "Among the nations it is rumored (and Geshem has substantiated this) that you and the Jews have intentions of revolting, and for this reason you are building the wall.

Furthermore, according to these rumors you are going to become their king. **7** You have also established prophets to announce in Jerusalem on your behalf, 'We have a king in Judah!' Now the king is going to hear about these rumors.

So come on! Let's talk about this."

8 I sent word back to him, "We are not engaged in these activities you are describing. All of this is a figment of your imagination."

9 All of them were wanting to scare us, supposing, "Their hands will grow slack from the work, and it won't get done."

So now, strengthen my hands!

10 Then I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel. He was confined to his home. He said, "Let's set up a time to meet in the house of God, within the temple. Let's close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. It will surely be at night that they will come to kill you."

11 But I replied, "Should a man like me run away?

Would someone like me flee to the temple in order to save his life? I will not go!" **12** I recognized the fact that God had not sent him, for he had spoken the prophecy against me as a hired agent of Tobiah and Sanballat. **13** He had been hired to scare me so that I would do this and thereby sin. They would thus bring reproach on me and I would be discredited. **14** Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat in light of these actions of theirs – also Noadiah the prophetess and the other prophets who were trying to scare me!

15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in just fifty-two days. **16** When all our enemies heard and all the nations who were around us saw this, they were greatly disheartened. They knew that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

17 In those days the aristocrats of Judah repeatedly sent letters to Tobiah, and responses from Tobiah were repeatedly coming to them. **18** For many in Judah had sworn allegiance to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah. His son Jonathan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah. **19** They were telling me about his good deeds and then taking back to him the things I said. Tobiah, on the other hand, sent letters in order to scare me.

1 When the wall had been rebuilt and I had positioned the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, Guzik - Nehemiah 7:1-73

Nehemiah 7 - The Wall Guarded

A. Watchmen provided for the walls.

1. (1-2) The appointment of Hanani and Hananiah.

Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

a. **Then it was, when the wall was built:** Everything was in order - both practically (**the wall . . . I hung the doors . . . the gatekeepers**) and spiritually (**the singers . . . the Levites**); the work was completed and set right.

i. The singers and the Levites were there to lead the people in worship; the walls were not rebuilt so the people of Jerusalem could look at nice walls. They were rebuilt so they could worship God with greater glory and freedom than ever before.

ii. Every victory in our life should take us deeper into praise. If we are not praising

God more, and more deeply, with each passing year, are we really having much victory? Maybe we are making it *through* tough times - but coming out more bitter and sour than ever. That is not God's victory. His victory leads to a sweeter spirit and to deeper praise.

b. **I gave the charge of Jerusalem:**

Nehemiah wasn't in this for political glory. He had done a work, and now he could let it go.

God would still use him in Jerusalem, but he knew it wasn't his place to stay in authority.

c. **Hanani:** This was Nehemiah's brother, was the one who first told him about the sad state of affairs in Jerusalem (Neh. 1:2). His initiative and concern made him well qualified to govern.

d. **He was a faithful man and feared God**

more than many: This described **Hananiah**, who was the co-leader of Jerusalem. This is what God needs in a man or a woman to use them greatly.

i. Many folks who aren't all that gifted - they can't sing, they can't remember a bunch of Bible verses, they don't have a knack for teaching, and so forth - can still be used

greatly of God if they are faithful and fear God. On the other hand, many terribly gifted people may always be frustrated in serving God, if they are not faithful and fearing God.

3. (3) A watch set on the walls.

And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand *guard*, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

a. Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard: A tremendous victory had been won - the walls were rebuilt. Yet, the walls would not protect themselves. Diligent watchmen must be appointed, and the walls had to be guarded.

i. The gates were to be opened late and closed early - it was a time for high security.

b. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem: In the Christian life, often a victory is won and later lost because there was no guard. An enemy may come in because we are not watching. Walls can be

climbed if there is no one there to stop the enemy, but an enemy is easily turned back from a wall by a guard.

B. List of the returned families.

1. (4-5) The need to develop Jerusalem.

Now the city *was* large and spacious, but the people in it *were* few, and the houses *were* not rebuilt. Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first *return*, and found written in it: a. **The people in it were few, and the**

houses were not rebuilt: Now that the walls were rebuilt, Nehemiah still wanted to see how he can be a blessing to the people of God and the city of God. He noticed that the

population was low and there were many abandoned houses.

b. **Then God put it into my heart:** Nehemiah wanted Jerusalem to grow and prosper. But

before that could happen he must first know who he had already. Just as when he toured the broken down walls in 2:11-16, he needed to know the problem well. So, he took a census and looked at the registry first written by Ezra in Ezr. 2:1-70.

2. (6-73) The citizens of Jerusalem who returned from the Babylonian captivity.

These *are* the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city. Those who came with Zerubbabel *were* Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: the sons of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two; the sons of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two; the sons of Arah, six hundred and fifty-two; the sons of Pahath-Moab, of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and eighteen; the sons of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; the sons of Zattu, eight hundred and forty-five; the sons of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty; the sons of Binnui, six hundred and forty-eight; the sons of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-eight; the sons of Azgad, two thousand three hundred and twenty-two; the sons of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-seven; the sons of Bigvai, two thousand and sixty-seven; the sons of Adin, six hundred and fifty-five; the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight; the sons of Hashum, three hundred and twenty-eight; the sons of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-four; the sons of Hariph, one hundred and twelve; the sons of Gibeon, ninety-five; the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred and eighty-eight; the men of

Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight; the men of Beth Azmaveth, forty-two; the men of Kirjath Jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three; the men of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one; the men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two; the men of Bethel and Ai, one hundred and twenty-three; the men of the other Nebo, fifty-two; the sons of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; the sons of Harim, three hundred and twenty; the sons of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five; the sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-one; the sons of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.

The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three; the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two; the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven; the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen. The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, *and* of the sons of Hodevah, seventy-four. The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and forty-eight. The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-eight.

The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth, the sons of

Keros, the sons of Sia, the sons of Padon, the sons of Lebana, the sons of Hagaba, the sons of Salmai, the sons of Hanan, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephishesim, the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, the sons of Bazlith, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tamah, the sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha. The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Perida, the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel, the

sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim, and the sons of Amon. All the Nethinim, and the sons of Solomon's servants, *were* three hundred and ninety-two.

And these *were* the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not identify their father's house nor their lineage, whether they *were* of Israel: the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and forty-two; and of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name. These sought their listing *among* those who were registered by genealogy, but it was not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled. And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim. Altogether the whole assembly *was* forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, besides their male and female servants, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers. Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, *their* camels four hundred and thirty-five, *and* donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty. And some of the heads of the fathers'

houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments. Some of the heads of the fathers'

houses gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas. And that which the rest of the people gave *was* twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments. So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, *some* of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the

seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

a. **These are the people . . . who returned to Jerusalem and Judah:** This list was important because each of these people were important to God, in that they did what so few of their fellow Jews did - they took the trouble to return back to the promised land after they had already set down roots for seventy years in the Babylonian empire.

i. These are people who had a pioneer spirit; they were willing to endure hardship and discomfort, because they had a call from God that was more important than their own comfort. Life was easier in Babylon, but it was better in Jerusalem!

b. **These are the people:** Since only about 2% of the Jews who were carried away into exile by the Babylonians came back, these one who did have the pioneer spirit are worthy of mention - and they are mentioned *twice* in God's eternal word (Here and in Ezra 2).

i. It would be wonderful to have your name in the Bible (at least in a positive light). Though that privilege is too late for us, God does have a *book of remembrance* (Neh.

3:16), and surely the names of God's faithful pioneers will be in it.

ii. In this list several things were important.

- Who the people were was important (specific names were mentioned).

- What families they came from was important (many family heads are named).

- Their gifts to support the work were important (they are specifically listed towards the end of the chapter).

c. **These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but it was not found:** Some could not be priests until their lineage was determined. In the Old Testament, one could not be a priest unless it was established that they descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses, and the first high priest over Israel.

d. **When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities:** This list flows beautifully after the completion of the work, because it reminds us that the work was really all about these people.

i. The walls weren't all that important; what was important was the benefit the walls could have in the lives of God's people (enabling them to live in peace and security).

ii. The building work wasn't all that important; what was important was the benefit the building work had in the lives of God's people (teaching them to work hard, work together, work through adversity and attack, and work till the job is done).

© 2006 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission **2** I then put in charge over Jerusalem my brother Hanani and Hananiah the chief of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many do. **3** I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem must not be opened in the early morning, until those who are standing guard close the doors and lock them. Position residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their guard stations and some near their homes." **4** Now the city was spread out and large, and there were not a lot of people in it. At that time houses had not been rebuilt. **5** My God placed it on my heart to gather the leaders, the officials, and the ordinary people so they could be enrolled on the basis of genealogy. I found the genealogical records of those who had formerly returned. Here is what I found written in that record: **6** These are the

people of the province who returned from the captivity of the exiles, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had forced into exile. They returned to Jerusalem and to Judah, each to his own city.

7 They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

The number of Israelite men was as follows: **8** the descendants of Parosh, 2,172; **9** the descendants of Shephatiah, 372; **10** the descendants of Arah, 652; **11** the descendants of Pahath-Moab (from the line of Jeshua and Joab), 2,818;

12 the descendants of Elam, 1,254;

13 the descendants of Zattu, 845;

14 the descendants of Zaccai, 760;

15 the descendants of Binnui, 648;

16 the descendants of Bebai, 628;

17 the descendants of Azgad, 2,322; **18** the descendants of Adonikam, 667; **19** the descendants of Bigvai, 2,067; **20** the descendants of Adin, 655;

21 the descendants of Ater (through Hezekiah), 98; **22** the descendants of Hashum, 328; **23** the descendants of Bezai, 324;

24 the descendants of Harif, 112;

25 the descendants of Gibeon, 95;

26 The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188; **27** the men of Anathoth, 128;

28 the men of the family of Azmaveth, 42; **29** the men of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth, 743; **30** the men of Ramah and Geba, 621;

31 the men of Micmash, 122;

32 the men of Bethel and Ai, 123;

33 the men of the other Nebo, 52;

34 the descendants of the other Elam, 1,254; **35** the descendants of Harim, 320; **36** the descendants of Jericho, 345; **37** the descendants of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, 721; **38** the descendants of Senaah, 3,930.

39 The priests:

the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua), 973;

40 the descendants of Immer, 1,052; **41** the descendants of Pashhur, 1,247; **42** the descendants of Harim, 1,017.

43 The Levites:

the descendants of Jeshua (through Kadmiel, through the line of Hodaviah), 74.

44 The singers:

the descendants of Asaph, 148.

45 The gatekeepers:

the descendants of Shallum, the descendants of Ater, the descendants of Talmon, the descendants of Akkub, the descendants of Hatita, and the descendants of Shobai, 138.

46 The temple servants:

the descendants of Ziha, the descendants of Hasupha, the descendants of Tabbaoth, **47** the descendants of Keros, the descendants of Sia, the descendants of Padon, **48** the descendants of Lebanah, the descendants of Hagabah, the

descendants of Shalmal, **49** the descendants of Hanan, the descendants of Giddel, the descendants of Gahar, **50** the descendants of Reaiah, the descendants of Rezin, the descendants of Nekoda, **51** the descendants of Gazzam, the descendants of Uzzah, the descendants of Paseah, **52** the descendants of Besai, the descendants of Meunim, the descendants of Nephussim, **53** the descendants of Bakbuk, the descendants of Hakupha, the descendants of Harhur, **54** the descendants of Bazluth, the descendants of Mehida, the descendants of Harsha, **55** the descendants of Barkos, the descendants of Sisera, the descendants of Temah, **56** the descendants of Neziah, the descendants of Hatipha.

57 The descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, the descendants of Sophereth, the descendants of Perida, **58** the descendants of Jaala, the descendants of Darkon, the descendants of Giddel, **59** the descendants of Shephatiah, the descendants of Hattil, the descendants of Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and the descendants of Amon.

60 All the temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon, 392.

61 These are the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer (although they were unable to certify their family connection or their ancestry, as to whether they were really from Israel): **62** the descendants of Delaiah, the descendants of Tobiah, and the descendants of Nekoda, 642.

63 And from among the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, the descendants of Hakkoz, and the descendants of Barzillai (who had married a woman from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name). **64**

They searched for their records in the genealogical materials, but none were found. They were therefore excluded from the priesthood. **65** The governor instructed them not to eat any of the sacred food until there was a priest who could consult the Urim and Thummim.

66 The entire group numbered 42,360, **67** not counting their 7,337 male and female servants. They also had 245 male and female singers. **68** They had 736 horses, 245 mules, **69** (7:68) 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys. **70** Some of the family leaders contributed to the work. The governor contributed to the treasury 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 bowls, and 530 priestly garments. **71** Some of the family leaders gave to the project treasury 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,200 silver minas. **72** What the rest of the people gave amounted to 20,000 gold drachmas, 2,000 silver minas, and 67 priestly garments.

73 The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all the rest of Israel lived in their cities.

When the seventh month arrived and the Israelites were settled in their cities,

1 all the people gathered together in the plaza which was in front of the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had commanded Israel.

Guzik - Nehemiah 8:1-18

Nehemiah 8 - The Spirit of God, Working through the Word of God, Brings Revival

J. Edwin Orr defined revival as: "The Spirit of God working through the Word of God, in the lives of the people of God."

This chapter is a great example of this.

A. Hearing God's Word sparks revival.

1. (1-3) The people gather and ask Ezra to read God's Word. Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning

until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law.

a. **They told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law:** This demonstrates that the Spirit of God was at work even before the reading of God's Word. People do not gather **together as one man** for the things of God unless the Spirit of God has moved them, and they do not desire God's Word unless the Spirit of God has moved them.

i. If you attend to the hearing of the Word of God, it is evidence the Spirit of God is working with you. But it is still important to cooperating with that work and to not resist it. We need to cooperate and flow with the work of God's Spirit if the Word of God is going to do its full work in us.

b. **The book of the Law of Moses:** This refers to the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

This was Israel's instruction manual for how to walk before God.

c. **Ezra the scribe . . . Ezra the priest:** Ezra was the man responsible for having the temple rebuilt, and for returning God's people to worship. Nehemiah, in all his work of rebuilding the walls, just carried on the work Ezra had begun.

i. We know Ezra cared about God's Word, because he was a **scribe** - someone who copied the Bible by hand. We know he was a man devoted to God Himself, because he was a godly **priest**.

d. **All who could hear with understanding:** This shows us *who* needed to hear the Word of God. Everyone who could understand it needed to hear it.

e. **Then he read from it in the open square:** Ezra read God's Word from daylight to mid-day.

For some six hours he read God's Word and the people listened.

i. This was a move of the Spirit of God.

People who will be **attentive to the Book of the Law** for some six hours are people touched by the Spirit of God.

ii. **From morning** is literally, "from the light." These people gathered from dawn to hear God's Word. They were willing to sacrifice something to hear it - they *wanted* it, and like Jacob they would not let go until they had their blessing.

2. (4-6) How God's Word was received.

So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, *and* Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

a. **So Ezra . . . stood on a platform:** They had taken the time to build a wooden platform so the Word of God could be heard. They did practical things so God's Word would have the greatest effect.

i. There are practical things we can do also to help God's Word have the greatest effect; when a room is comfortable, low in distractions, and the preacher is clearly heard, it helps God's Word have the greatest effect.

ii. But by far, the greatest preparation must happen in the heart. We must come, willing to forget about ourselves and our own agenda, and submit ourselves to God's Word - not the preacher's word, but God's Word.

b. **At his right hand . . . and at his left hand:** On the right hand and left hand of Ezra were men who were supporting him in his ministry of teaching God's Word. The ministry of God's Word has the greatest effect when people can see men who are in support of it and obedience to it.

c. **When he opened it, all the people stood up:** They had a *respect* for God's Word. They recognized it for what it was - the Word of God, not the word of man. They honored it.

i. This is evidence of two things. First, that the Spirit of God is at work; second, that

something good is going to happen.

d. **Then all the people answered:** This work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God had three immediate results.

- The people *thanked God* (by saying **Amen** when Ezra blessed the Lord)

- They prayed (by lifting up their hands)

- They worshipped (by bowing down before Him)

i. Thanksgiving, prayer, and praise are all good measures of how the Spirit of God and

Word of God are working in us.

3. (7-8) God's Word is presented so the people may understand.

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people *stood* in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

a. **Helped the people to understand the**

Law: Special men were appointed to help the people **understand** God's Word. After the reading they needed to understand it because if they did not understand it, it would do little good.

i. *Understanding* needs to be the first goal of any preacher or teacher. When I stand to

teach God's people, there are some things that I always need to remember:

- If you leave knowing five helpful hints to a better life, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.

- If you leave having been amused by humor, entertained by anecdotes, or captivated by dramatic stories, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.

- If you leave motivated to action, or praying a prayer, but it is not based on a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.

- If you leave admiring me, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed - and will be accountable before God for my failure.

b. Helped the people to understand the

Law: It is important to see why God's people need special help in understanding God's Word.

i. First, because the things of God are spiritually discerned and not intellectually discerned. The Holy Spirit uses gifted teachers to bring spiritual discernment to us, helping us to understand what God's Word says.

ii. Second, because it was first written in a different language, in a different culture, in a different place, and at a far distant time.

Teachers help us understand it all in our own day.

iii. Third, because our minds are often slow to understand things that will convict our hearts. We often need it spelled right out to us.

iv. Understanding isn't only necessary for those who haven't become familiar with the Bible. Sometimes if we have heard it ten times before, we really don't understand it for right now. When an art restorer cleans a painting, he reveals things that were always there, but the colors weren't as bright and the details weren't as clear, because they were obscured - then the real impact of the painter's work can be seen.

c. **They read distinctly:** The preacher must speak in a clear, easy-to-understand way. His main goal is to make the people understand, not to impress or entertain them.

d. **They gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading:** The preacher must communicate the sense of the passage of Scripture, and not his own agenda or favorite personal topics. The people must leave understanding God's Word better, not understanding the preacher's opinions better.

B. Response to God's Word makes revival flow.

1. (9-11) The people respond with weeping.

And Nehemiah, who *was* the governor, Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day *is* holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep."

For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day *is* holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day *is* holy; do not be grieved."

a. **All the people wept, when they heard**

the words of the Law: The Word of God was doing its intended work. 2Ti. 3:16 tells us two things the Word of God is profitable for: *reproof* and *correction*. Sometimes it hurts to be reproved and corrected, and these tears were evidence of some of that pain.

b. **Do not mourn nor weep:** Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites did not want the people to mourn, even though it is a good thing to be sad under the conviction of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Yet if the sense of conviction is greater than the sense that God is doing a good and holy work, then tears are not good.

i. Our knowledge of our sin should never be bigger than our knowledge of Jesus as our savior. We are great sinners, but He is a greater savior.

ii. Therefore, *the joy of the Lord is your strength* - even when you are being convicted of sin. When we are convicted of sin we know that God is doing a work in us, so we can be glad and take joy.

c. **Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD**

is your strength: The people *felt* sad, because they were aware of their own sin. But they could walk in *joy* because God was doing a great work. Our emotions are not beyond our control; we can do God's will even when we don't feel like it.

2. (12) The people choose to rejoice.

And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

a. **They understood the words that were**

declared to them: They went away praising God, because understanding God's Word brings such a sweet sense of joy.

3. (13) The leaders gather for more study of God's Word.

Now on the second day the heads of the fathers'

houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

a. **The heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites:** Leaders have a special need to understand and walk in God's Word. Their ignorance or disobedience affects far more than themselves -

it affects everyone they have and influence on.

4. (14-18) The people keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as *it is* written." Then the people went out and brought *them* and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day *there was* a sacred assembly, according to the *prescribed* manner.

a. **And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by**

Moses: This was beautiful, simple obedience.

Their attitude was that God said it, so we will do it. Even though tradition did not tell them to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (it had not been done **since the days of Joshua**), but they relied on God's Word, not on tradition.

b. **That the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month:** The Feast of Tabernacles was all about remembering how God had blessed and provided for Israel in the wilderness during the Exodus. They could see God's blessing and provision for them right then, and it made

something old seem brand new to them.

c. **And there was very great gladness:** Because of their great obedience to God's Word, there was **very great gladness**. We often are deceived into thinking the path of gladness is in doing our own thing, but gladness and freedom come only through obedience.

d. **Day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God:** This revival began by the Spirit of God working through the Word of God; it continued that way also.

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2 So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly which included men and women and all those able to understand what they heard. (This happened on the first day of the seventh month.) **3** So he read it before the plaza in front of the Water Gate from dawn till noon before the men and women and those children who could understand. All the people were eager to hear the book of the law.

4 Ezra the scribe stood on a towering wooden platform constructed for this purpose. Standing near him on his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Masseiah. On his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. **5**

Ezra opened the book in plain view of all the people, for he was elevated above all the people. When he opened the book, all the people stood up. **6** Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people replied "Amen! Amen!"

as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

7 Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodia, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah – all of whom were Levites – were teaching the people the law, as the people remained standing. **8** They read from the book of God's law, explaining it and imparting

insight. Thus the people gained understanding from what was read.

9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priestly scribe, and the Levites who were imparting understanding to the people said to all of them, "This day is holy to the LORD

your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping when they heard the words of the law. **10**

He said to them, "Go and eat delicacies and drink sweet drinks and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

11 Then the Levites quieted all the people saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy. Do not grieve." **12** So all the people departed to eat and drink and to share their food with others and to enjoy tremendous joy, for they had gained insight in the matters that had been made known to them.

13 On the second day of the month the family leaders met with Ezra the scribe, together with all the people, the priests, and the Levites, to consider the words of the law.

14 They discovered written in the law that the LORD had commanded through Moses that the Israelites should live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month,

15 and that they should make a proclamation and disseminate this message in all their cities and in Jerusalem: "Go to the hill country and bring back olive branches and branches of wild olive trees, myrtle trees, date palms, and other leafy trees to construct temporary shelters, as it is written."

16 So the people went out and brought these things back and constructed temporary shelters for themselves, each on his roof and in his courtyard and in the courtyards of the temple of God and in the plaza of the Water Gate and the plaza of the Ephraim Gate. **17** So all the assembly which had returned from the exile constructed temporary shelters and lived in them. The Israelites had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day.

Everyone experienced very great joy. **18** Ezra read in the book of the law of God day by day, from the first day to the last. They observed the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day they held an assembly as was required.

1 On the twenty-fourth day of this same month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting and wearing sackcloth, their heads covered with dust.

Guzik - Nehemiah 9:1-38

Nehemiah 9 - Israel Confesses Their Sin

A. A repentant nation gathers.

1. (1) An assembly of humble repentance.

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.

a. **The children of Israel were assembled:** After the wall was completed, after the wall was working, after the people had heard and obeyed God's Word, after the Holy Spirit was doing a significant work in the lives of people - now there is a scene of dramatic, humble repentance.

b. **Assembled with fasting:** Fasting showed their lowly, humble state. They considered themselves so poor before God that they had no food. They also wanted to say, "we are so troubled by our sin, food seems unimportant."

c. **In sackcloth:** This was wearing rough fabric, like a burlap bag. Again, this was to show their complete poverty of spirit before God. They also wanted to say, "we are so troubled by our sin, the normal comforts of life are unimportant."

d. **With dust on their heads:** This meant they took little handfuls of dirt and cast them on their heads. This was also to show their lowly state before God, and to say "we are so troubled by our sin, the normal comforts of life are unimportant."

i. All of this reflects a humble attitude of heart - humble not only towards God, but also humble towards man. They did this

publicly, and others would see them in this public state.

ii. Surely there were those among them who said, "I won't humiliate myself and join in."

Others must have said, "I'll do it, just so others can see that I'm spiritual too." But there were many, if not most, who came to God with truly humble, repentant hearts.

2. (2) An assembly to separate themselves.

Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

a. **Then those of Israelite lineage**

separated themselves from all foreigners: Those who were of the pure line of Israel came forth to confess the sin of their nation; they confessed **their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.**

b. **Confessed their sins:** This was important.

They had to realize and admit their missing of God's mark.

i. How do we sin? The English word *sin*

comes from the idea "to miss the mark." In an archery tournament, if one did not hit the target in the right place, they would say they "sinned." A sin might miss the target by an inch, or it might miss it by ten feet - but it was still a sin either way. We sin when we do what God has told us not to do (telling us either in His Word, in our conscience, or through legitimate authority), or when we do *not* do what God has told to do (telling us in Word, conscience, or authority). Not all sin is the same, but all sin *is* sin.

c. **And the iniquities of their fathers:** This was also important, because they had to admit that not only they were sinners, but they came from sinful ancestors. This was especially important in Israel, where there was a tradition of glorifying their forefathers.

i. This does not mean there was some type

of "generational curse" that had to be broken. God does not punish the children for their father's sin, and it is *evil* to say

He does (Ezekiel 18). We do recognize that those raised in an environment of sin may very well repeat those same sins, but not because they *must* - but because their environment made it an easy choice to make.

d. **They stood and confessed:** It should not seem strange that after such great victories, both with building and spiritually, that there was such humble repentance. This shows that repentance isn't something we finish after coming to Jesus. It is something that grows as we grow closer to Jesus.

i. "Repentance grows as faith grows. Do not make any mistake about it; repentance is not a thing of days and weeks, a temporary penance to be got over as fast as possible! No it is the grace of a lifetime, like faith itself. Repentance is the inseparable companion of faith." (Spurgeon)

ii. "How often the discovery of something new in the loveliness of the Lord Jesus has brought with it the discovery of some new corruption in our own hearts. . . . God will never plant the seed of His life upon the soil of a hard, unbroken spirit. He will only plant that seed where the conviction of His Spirit has brought brokenness, where the soil has been watered with the tears of repentance

as well as the tears of joy." (Redpath) iii. This great, humble gathering of God's

people took place only two days after the end of the joyful celebration of the feast of tabernacles. They had drawn close to God, and now He is drawing them even closer!

3. (3) An assembly to hear God's Word and to worship Him. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God *for one-* fourth of the day;

and *for another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

a. **They stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law:** The humble repentance and confession of sin would have been an incomplete work if it were not for hearing the Word and worship. God does not show us our sin just so we will humbly confess it, but so that we can walk on in what is right before Him.

i. "In light of the previous chapter we may take it that the reading was no mere stream of words, but punctuated with explanatory comments and applications to the present situation." (Kidner).

b. **They confessed and worshipped the LORD their God:** This *brokenness of heart* has led them to humbly come before God and hear His Word. A sure first step of revival is this brokenness of heart.

B. The prayer of repentance.

1. (4-5a) Those leading the congregation.

Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, *and* Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God. And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said: a. **Then Jeshua, Bani . . .** : This mentions those Levites and leaders gathered to lead the people in their humble confession. It shouldn't surprise us, or make us feel like failures, if we must be led into confession and repentance.

b. **Stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice:** Obviously, all eight of these men did not pray the following prayer at the same time. Perhaps it was written out and they took turns, perhaps it was spontaneously prayed in succession, or perhaps (and according to tradition), Ezra prayed this prayer.

i. The following prayer is thought to be the longest prayer in the Bible - and yet takes only six and one half minutes to

say. Prayer does not need to be long to be glorious and effective.

2. (5b-6) Praise to the God of all creation.

Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God Forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise! You alone *are* the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.

a. **You have made heaven:** After the encouragement to praise, Ezra gave a reason to praise - because this is the great God who made it all. Looking at the glory of God's creation gives us a reason to praise Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to trust Him.

b. **The host of heaven worships You:** God wants us to praise Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to trust Him - but He gives us good reason to. We sometimes want our own reasons, but God gives us plenty of His own reasons.

3. (7-8) Praise to the God who chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants.

You *are* the LORD God, who chose Abram, and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and gave him the name Abraham; You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites; to give *it* to his descendants. You have performed Your words, for You *are* righteous.

a. **You have performed Your words:** This says to God, "Lord, You promised this land to Abraham and his descendants, and now here we are! Your promise is indeed true."

4. (9-15) Praise to the God who delivered Israel from Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness.

You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red Sea. You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his servants, and against all the people of his land.

For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You made a name for Yourself, as *it is* this day. And You divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors You threw into the deep, as a stone into the mighty waters.

Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar, and by night with a pillar of fire, to give them light on the road which they should travel.

You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just

ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your

holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts,

statutes and laws, by the hand of Moses Your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, and brought them water out of the rock for their thirst, and told them to go in to possess the land which You had sworn to give them.

a. **You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt:** A second sure sign of revival (following brokenness of heart) is *reflection on the goodness of God*. When our pride is cast down, and our hearts humble before God, we can begin to see Him for who He is - and when we see that, we see how good God is.

5. (16-17a) The sinful response of man to God's goodness.

But they and our fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks, and did not heed Your

commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage.

a. **But they and our fathers:** This was a terrible response to the great and good works of God on behalf of Israel. God

had been so good to Israel, **but they and our fathers acted proudly**. Our sin is bad enough; but to consider we sin against a God who has only treated us well is far, far, worse.

c. **Hardened their necks . . . refused to obey . . . were not mindful**: This is a third sure sign of revival - *recognition of our own sinfulness*. When we humbly seek God, and see His goodness, we can't help but next to notice our own sinfulness - the blackness of our sin stands out against the brightness of God's purity and goodness.

6. (17b-21) God's gracious reply to rebellious Israel.

But You *are* God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them. Even when they made a molded calf for themselves, and said, 'This *is* your god that brought you up out of Egypt,' and worked great provocations, yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, to lead them on the road; nor the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way they should go. You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness, they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

a. **But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them**: God's gracious answer to the rebellion of Israel was glorious. **Ready to pardon** is especially wonderful, indicating that there is nothing keeping God from pardoning us except our refusal to come to Him through Jesus. *He is ready to pardon*, if we are ready to receive it.

b. **Even when they made a molded calf for themselves**: This was God's gracious response to Israel - even after they made the golden calf and worshipped it, He still did not forsake them.

He still provided the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, He still guided them by His spirit, He still fed them and gave them water.

Together it all shows not how special Israel was, but how special God is.

c. **You sustained them in the wilderness:** We are often impressed at how patient God is with the sinner; how He somehow holds back His terrible judgment against those people who deserve it so badly. Yet it seems that His patience toward us is even greater, those who have received so much more from Him, but still act like Israel did.

i. "God's mercy with a sinner is only equaled and perhaps outmatched by His patience

with the saints, with you and me." (Redpath) 7. (22-31) The cycle of Israel's relationship with God.

Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations, and divided them into districts. So they took possession of the land of Sihon, the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and brought them into the land which You had told their fathers to go in and possess. So the people went in and possessed the land; You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they wished. And they took strong cities and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all goods, cisterns *already* dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations.

Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to

Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies, and testified against them, that You might bring them back to Your law. Yet they acted proudly, and did not heed Your commandments, but sinned against Your judgments, "Which if a man does, he shall live by them." And they shrugged their shoulders, stiffened their necks, and would not hear. Yet for many years You had patience with them, and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You *are* God, gracious and merciful.

a. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness:

The cycle began with God showing His goodness to His people (**You gave them kingdoms and nations**) and with God's people being blessed.

b. Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You: Then, in the time of comfort and abundance, God's people turn from Him.

c. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies: Then, God brings correction - a "wake-up call" to His people.

d. And in the time of their trouble . . . they cried out to You; and God delivers them: You heard from heaven . . . You gave them deliverers: As a result, God's people then turn back to Him.

e. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You: Then, blessed and satisfied, God's people again turn from Him, and the cycle continues.

f. Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and

merciful: As the cycle continues, the motions of each cycle get deeper and deeper - but God doesn't change.

i. We sometimes feel as if God has gotten tired of us; that we can't ask him to forgive us for something He has forgiven us for so many times before. But God never gets tired of us, and never turns away the repentant heart.

8. (32-37) A plea to God for intervention.

Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and awesome God, who keeps covenant and

mercy: Do not let all the trouble seem small before You that has come upon us, our kings and our princes, our priests and our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day. However You *are* just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly.

Neither our kings nor our princes, our priests nor our fathers, have kept Your law, nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, with which You testified against them. For they have not served You in their kingdom, or in the many good *things* that You gave them, or in the large and rich land which You set before them; nor did they turn from their wicked works. Here we *are*, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its bounty, here we *are*, servants in it! And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, because of our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle at their pleasure; and we *are* in great distress.

a. The great, the mighty, and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy:

Because of who God is, and because of who

they are (rebellious and wicked), they needed God to do the work of saving them from their enemies.

i. Israel, at this time, was not an independent nation - they were a province of the Empire of Persia, and were under heavy Persian taxes and obligations. They ask God to deliver them once again from this oppression!

b. **You are just in all that has befallen us:** This gives a good description of what real confession is all about. It recognizes that God is right and we are wrong (**but we have done wickedly**). Confession is agreeing with God about both things.

i. "It is a tremendous moment in a Christians' life when he can honestly look up into the face of God and say, 'Yes, Lord, You are right and I am wrong,' when he stops arguing with God, and drops his controversy.

He says, 'Lord, yes. I've got what I deserved in this situation. You are right; I am wrong.'

That is the thing for which God has been working in your life and mine from the very moment of our conversion." (Redpath)

9. (38) Conclusion: a point of decision.

And because of all this, we make a sure *covenant*, and write *it*; our leaders, our Levites, *and* our priests seal *it*.

a. **We make a sure covenant:** Israel needed to come to this place, where knowing who God is, and knowing who they are, they come and make a *covenant* with God - even writing it down - to commit themselves to His ways.

b. **We make a sure covenant, and write it:** The fourth sure sign of revival - after brokenness of heart, after reflection on God's goodness, after recognition of our sinfulness, is *a renewal of our obedience*. We come to a place of decision, so this work of God is not just a wonderful experience, but something that shapes our future.

i. God's work in us often must come to a place of decision - where He wants us to make a stand for Him, and against some other things. If *you* need a point of decision, Alan Redpath gave these self-examination questions, to give an idea how:

What about my relationship with men?

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better man than I really am? Is there the least suspicion of hypocrisy in my life? Am I honest in all my words and acts?

Do I exaggerate?

Am I reliable? Can I be trusted? Do I confidentially pass on what was told to me in confidence? Do I grumble and complain in the church?

Am I jealous, impure, irritable, touchy, distrustful? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? Am I proud? Do I thank God I am not as other people? Is there anyone I fear, or dislike, or criticize, or resent? If so, what am I doing about it?

What about my devotion to God?

Does the Bible live to me? Do I give it time to speak to me? Do I go to bed in time and do I get up in time?

Am I enjoying my prayer life today? Did I enjoy it this morning? When I am involved in a problem in life, do I talk about it or pray about it?

Am I disobeying God in anything, or insisting upon doing something about which my conscience is very uneasy?

When did I last speak to someone else with the object of trying to win him for Christ?

Am I a slave to books, dress, friends, work, or what others think? How do I spend my spare time?

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2 Those truly of Israelite descent separated from all the foreigners, standing and confessing their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. **3** For one-fourth of the day they stood in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God, and for another fourth they were confessing their sins and worshiping the LORD their God. **4** Then the Levites – Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani – stood on the steps and called out loudly to the LORD their God. **5**

The Levites – Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah – said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God!”

“May you be blessed, O LORD our God, from age to age.

May your glorious name be blessed; may it be lifted up above all blessing and praise. **6** You alone are the LORD.

You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, along with all their multitude of stars, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You impart life to them all, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

7 “You are the LORD God who chose Abram and brought him forth from Ur of the Chaldeans. You changed his name to Abraham. **8** When you perceived that his heart was faithful toward you, you established a covenant with him to give his descendants the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites. You have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous.

9 “You saw the affliction of our ancestors in Egypt, and you heard their cry at the Red Sea. **10** You performed awesome signs against Pharaoh, against his servants, and against all the people of his land, for you knew that the Egyptians had acted presumptuously against them. You made for yourself a name that is celebrated to this day. **11**

You split the sea before them, and they crossed through the sea on dry ground! But you threw their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into surging waters. **12** You guided them

with a pillar of cloud by day and with a pillar of fire by night to illumine for them the path they were to travel.

13 “You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven. You provided them with just judgments, true laws, and good statutes and commandments. **14** You made known to them your holy Sabbath; you issued commandments, statutes, and law to them through Moses your servant. **15** You provided bread from heaven for them in their time of hunger, and you brought forth water from the rock for them in their time of thirst. You told them to enter in order to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.

16 “But they – our ancestors – behaved presumptuously; they rebelled and did not obey your commandments. **17** They refused to obey and did not recall your miracles that you had performed among them.

Instead, they rebelled and appointed a leader to return to their bondage in Egypt. But you are a God of forgiveness, merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and unfailing in your loyal love. You did not abandon them, **18**

even when they made a cast image of a calf for themselves and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up from Egypt,’ or when they committed atrocious blasphemies.

19 “Due to your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. The pillar of cloud did not stop guiding them in the path by day, nor did the pillar of fire stop illuminating for them by night the path on which they should travel. **20** You imparted your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths; you provided water for their thirst. **21** For forty years you sustained them. Even in the desert they never lacked anything. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

22 “You gave them kingdoms and peoples, and you allocated them to every corner of the land. They inherited the land of King Sihon of Heshbon and the land of King Og of

Bashan. **23** You multiplied their descendants like the stars of the sky. You brought them to the land you had told their ancestors to enter in order to possess. **24** Their descendants entered and possessed the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites who were the inhabitants of the land. You delivered them into their hand, together with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with as they pleased. **25** They captured fortified cities and fertile land. They took possession of houses full of all sorts of good things – wells previously dug, vineyards, olive trees, and fruit trees in abundance.

They ate until they were full and grew fat. They enjoyed to the full your great goodness.

26 “Nonetheless they grew disobedient and rebelled against you; they disregarded your law. They killed your prophets who had solemnly admonished them in order to cause them to return to you. They committed atrocious blasphemies. **27** Therefore you delivered them into the hand of their adversaries, who oppressed them. But in the time of their distress they called to you, and you heard from heaven. In your abundant compassion you provided them with deliverers to rescue them from their adversaries.

28 “Then, when they were at rest again, they went back to doing evil before you. Then you abandoned them to their enemies, and they gained dominion over them. When they again cried out to you, in your compassion you heard from heaven and rescued them time and again. **29** And you solemnly admonished them in order to return them to your law, but they behaved presumptuously and did not obey your commandments. They sinned against your ordinances – those by which an individual, if he obeys them, will live. They boldly turned from you; they rebelled and did not obey.

30 You prolonged your kindness with them for many years, and you solemnly admonished them by your Spirit through your prophets. Still they paid no attention, so you delivered them into the hands of the neighboring peoples. **31**

However, due to your abundant mercy you did not do away with them altogether; you did not abandon them. For you are a merciful and compassionate God.

32 “So now, our God – the great, powerful, and awesome God, who keeps covenant fidelity – do not regard as inconsequential all the hardship that has befallen us – our kings, our leaders, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all your people – from the days of the kings of Assyria until this very day! **33** You are righteous with regard to all that has happened to us, for you have acted faithfully. It is we who have been in the wrong! **34** Our kings, our leaders, our priests, and our ancestors have not kept your law. They have not paid attention to your commandments or your testimonies by which you have solemnly admonished them. **35** Even when they were in their kingdom and benefiting from your incredible goodness that you had lavished on them in the spacious and fertile land you had set before them, they did not serve you, nor did they turn from their evil practices.

36 “So today we are slaves! In the very land you gave to our ancestors to eat its fruit and to enjoy its good things – we are slaves! **37** Its abundant produce goes to the kings you have placed over us due to our sins. They rule over our bodies and our livestock as they see fit, and we are in great distress!

38 (10:1) “Because of all of this we are entering into a binding covenant in written form; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests have affixed their names on the sealed document.”

1 On the sealed documents were the following names: Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah, along with Zedekiah, Guzik - Nehemiah 10:1-39

Nehemiah 10 - Israel's Covenant with God

A. Roster of those who signed the covenant.

1. (1-8) Nehemiah and the priests signed the covenant.

Now those who placed *their* seal on *the document* were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, *and* Shemaiah. These *were* the priests.

a. Those who placed their seal on the

document: At the end of Nehemiah chapter 9, the people had come to a place of decision, and now, collectively, the nation was going to do something about it by entering into a covenant.

i. Neh. 8:38 gives the sense of this: *And because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; and our leaders and our Levites and our priests shall seal it.*

ii. In Neh. 8:38, *make a covenant* is literally

"*cut* a covenant"; covenants were not made in the ancient world, they were *cut* -

because almost always an animal was sacrificed as part of the covenant. A

covenant always cost something, and our point of decision will cost us something - the self-life, comfort, ease, some of the passing pleasures of this world. Count the cost to see if it's worth it!

b. Those who placed their seal on the

document: It was wonderful for the nation as a whole to feel that something had to be done about the sin problem among them. But it was meaningless unless individuals came forth to say " *we* will do something about this." Here are the leaders (84 in all) willing to put their name on the line for the covenant before God.

c. On the document: These people in

Nehemiah's day knew what covenants were all about, and how important they were to God.

They remembered God made a covenant with

Abraham, promising that both a nation and the Messiah would descend from him; God made a

covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel when He gave them the law at Mount Sinai;

God made a covenant with King David, promising the Messiah would come from his family. But the greatest covenant, the New Covenant instituted by the Messiah, was yet to come.

2. (9-13) The Levites who signed the covenant.

The Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, *and* Kadmiel. Their brethren: Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Bani, *and* Beninu.

3. (14-27) The civic leaders who signed the covenant.

The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, Malluch, Harim, *and* Baanah.

B. The terms of the covenant.

1. (28-29) The making of the covenant with God.

Now the rest of the people; the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the

Nethinim, and all those who had separated

themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding; these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes: a. **Now**

the rest of the people: The 84

mentioned previously sealed the covenant, but **the rest of the people** - that is, **everyone who had knowledge and understanding** -

also made the covenant with God.

b. Entered into a curse and an oath to

walk in God's law: In making the covenant, they agreed to accept a curse from God if they did not obey His law. They accepted the curse as a form of His correction, to bring them back to obedience.

i. Many of us have done a similar thing. We probably didn't pray "God, curse me if I disobey You." But many of us have prayed, "Lord, whatever it takes I want to follow You. Whatever it takes I want to be Your man." That is essentially praying the same thing, and that is a good prayer.

c. Their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge

and understanding: They made this covenant publicly; though its most significant meaning was between the individual and God, it was also important that other people be witness to the covenant. A public covenant meant accountability.

2. (30) Their first area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to our romantic relationships.

We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons;

a. We would not give our daughters as

wives to the people of the land: This promise was addressed to parents. This is because in that day, *parents* made the marriage decisions, not the people getting married.

i. If this covenant were to be repeated today, it wouldn't be focused towards the parents, but towards the individuals who wanted to get married.

b. We would not give our daughters as

wives to the peoples of the land: This preserved the important principle that a follower of God should only marry another similarly committed follower of God. It is obvious by

experience and observation that it is important to carefully and prayerfully choose your spouse.

i. Many of us have remarkable stories of how we came together with our mate - some stories are romantic, and others are kind of strange. Once we are together, God wants to make that marriage something special before Him, and desires to draw the couple closer together as they draw closer to God, as the sides of a triangle come closer as they come higher up.

ii. But if one is not now married, it is important for them to make the same kind of covenant. If one has given their life to serving Jesus Christ, there will be difficulty if they marry someone who has given their life to something else. If one is in that situation now, God can do great things, but one should never knowingly choose to be in that place from the beginning.

iii. The whole idea of marriage is closely connected to the idea of *covenant*. Mal. 2:14 says, *Yet she is your companion, and your wife by covenant*. Marriage is a covenant, between the husband and wife, between them and all family and witness, but most importantly, between them and God.

iv. When we understand marriage as a covenant, we have something to bond us together that is *stronger* than society's expectations, *more constant* than romantic love, and *more certain* than happy times -

we have a covenant.

3. (31) Second area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to doing business.

If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's *produce* and the exacting of every debt.

a. **If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day:** Under the Old Testament law, God said that no one could buy or sell anything on the Sabbath day. These citizens of Jerusalem had been breaking this law, and they now covenant with God to obey it.

b. **We would not buy it from them on the Sabbath:** The motive for breaking this law was clear. They could make more money selling on seven days of the week instead of six days. This was a covenant to only make money in ways that were obedient and glorifying to God.

i. This is a great challenge for the church today, when many are in careers where they

have the opportunity to make money in ways that are plain wrong. We need to have the same heart they had here, and covenant before God to only make money in ways that are obedient and glorifying to Him.

ii. Many of us - as was true in Nehemiah's day - slip into these practices subtly. We don't wake up in the morning saying we're going to cut corners, cheat others, and defraud the system. We do it because we think we *need* to - bills need to be paid, the kids need things, and so on. Then we do it because it *works*. But we don't really need to; if we trust God, He will take care of us.

We should never trust our slick ways of doing business more than we trust God in heaven.

4. (32-39) The third area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to supporting God's work.

Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the

New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for *bringing* the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers'

houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God as *it is* written in the Law. And *we made ordinances* to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the LORD; to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as *it is* written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, *the* new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary *are, where* the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers *are*; and we will not neglect the house of our God.

a. To exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: They laid down a yearly tax to support the workings of the temple. They required people to bring wood to the temple on a rotating basis. They committed themselves to obey the command to bring the firstborn and the firstfruits, and the tithe (ten percent of the produce of their land) unto the house of God.

i. They simply did two things. First, they agreed to give as God had commanded (the

firstborn, firstfruits, and the tithe). Second, they agreed to give as the special need required (the one-third of a shekel tax and the wood).

ii. Firstborn and firstfruits were risky ways to give, because your land might not yield much more produce, and your cow or ewe might not give birth again - yet the first still belonged to God, and was given to the priests. God promised to bless this giving of the firstfruits and firstborn in faith: *Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.* (Pro. 3:9-10).

b. We will not neglect the house of our

God: If before they covenanted to make money only in ways that would glorify God, here they covenant to spend their money in ways that glorify God - and beginning it all with giving unto the Lord.

c. We will not neglect the house of our

God: Simply said, the Bible says we need to be givers. Not so much for the sake of those we give to, but because giving sets our heart right about material things. God Himself is the greatest giver.

i. If you hold on to money so tightly that you will not be a giver, then you have revealed where your heart is when it comes to money.

ii. The New Testament speaks with great clarity on the principle of giving; that giving should be regular, planned, proportional, and private (1Co. 16:1-4); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9).

iii. If you are reluctant to be a giver as the Bible says you should, simply talk to those who are. Ask them if it has been a blessing or a curse in their life to give as God says to.

God promises He will never owe us anything, and we cannot out-give God - though the return is often far better than dollars and cents.

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2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,

4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, **5** Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

8 Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests.

9 The Levites were as follows:

Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel.

10 Their colleagues were as follows: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,

13 Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

14 The leaders of the people were as follows: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,

15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,

17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,

18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,

19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,

20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,

21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,

22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,

23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,

24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,

25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,

26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,

27 Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

28 “Now the rest of the people – the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple attendants, and all those who have separated themselves from the neighboring peoples because of the law of God, along with their wives, their sons, and their daughters, all of whom are able to understand – **29** hereby participate with their colleagues the town leaders and enter into a curse and an oath to adhere to the law of God which was given through Moses the servant of God, and to obey carefully all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, along with his ordinances and his statutes.

30 “We will not give our daughters in marriage to the neighboring peoples, and we will not take their daughters in marriage for our sons. **31** We will not buy on the Sabbath or on a holy day from the neighboring peoples who bring their wares and all kinds of grain to sell on the Sabbath day. We will let the fields lie fallow every seventh year, and we will cancel every loan. **32** We accept responsibility for fulfilling the commands to give one third of a shekel each year for the work of the temple of our God, **33** for the loaves of presentation and for the regular grain offerings and regular burnt offerings, for the Sabbaths, for the new moons, for the appointed meetings, for the holy offerings, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the temple of our God.

34 “We – the priests, the Levites, and the people – have cast lots concerning the wood offerings, to bring them to the temple of our God according to our families at the designated times year by year to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as is written in the law. **35** We also accept responsibility for bringing the first fruits of our land and the first fruits of every fruit tree year by year to the temple of the LORD. **36** We also accept responsibility, as is written in the law, for bringing the firstborn of our sons and our cattle and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks to the temple of our God, to the priests who are ministering in the temple

of our God. **37** We will also bring the first of our coarse meal, of our contributions, of the fruit of every tree, of new wine, and of olive oil to the priests at the storerooms of the temple of our God, along with a tenth of the produce of our land to the Levites, for the Levites are the ones who collect the tithes in all the cities where we work. **38** A priest of Aaron's line will be with the Levites when the Levites collect the tithes, and the Levites will bring up a tenth of the tithes to the temple of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. **39** The Israelites and the Levites will bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil to the storerooms where the utensils of the sanctuary are kept, and where the priests who minister stay, along with the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the temple of our God."

1 So the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, while the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to settle in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the other nine remained in other cities.

Guzik - Nehemiah 11:1-36

Nehemiah 11 - The Citizens of Jerusalem

A. Recruiting citizens of Jerusalem.

1. (1) Those who will live in Jerusalem.

Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths *were to dwell in other cities*.

a. **To bring one out of ten to dwell in**

Jerusalem: It wasn't enough to see the city walls rebuilt and the spiritual renewal of the people of Jerusalem; now they concerned themselves with getting more people into the city.

i. For a city to prosper and be great, it must be populated. And for more than seventy years, Jerusalem had been nothing but a ghost town. Now, over the last eighty or so years, it has been repopulated, with a new

temple built (under Ezra) and the walls rebuilt (under Nehemiah). But the city still needed more people.

ii. Nehemiah also knew the bigger the population of Jerusalem, the greater the resources for defense and strength in battle.

He didn't rebuild the walls just to see some conquering army come and break them down again!

b. **Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem:**

It was good that the **leaders of the people** set the example by living in Jerusalem. Leaders must set the pattern by their lives. They had no right to expect the people to live in Jerusalem if they themselves were not living there.

c. **One out of ten:** The rest of the people submitted themselves to a lottery system,

where one out of ten would be selected to move from the surrounding regions into the city of Jerusalem. So, in the end, at least ten percent of Judah's population would live in Jerusalem.

2. (2) Blessing the citizens of Jerusalem.

And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

a. **And the people blessed all the men:** Apart from the leaders (who had a special obligation) and those selected in the lottery (who were also obligated), there were **all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem**. These men had a special blessing.

i. They had a unique pioneer spirit. They had the ability to endure some measure of hardship or discomfort to accomplish a greater work for God's kingdom.

ii. It was in these days in the rebuilding of Jerusalem that God asked an important

question through the prophet Zechariah: *For who has despised the day of small things?*

(Zec. 4:10). The answer is, "Many of us have!" But these who offered themselves to **willingly** live at Jerusalem, so as to take what is small and build it up before the Lord, have decided to not despise the day of small things.

b. To dwell at Jerusalem: If such a blessing is reserved for those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem, there was something special about the challenge of living in Jerusalem.

i. To live in Jerusalem, you had to re-order your view of material things. You had to give up land in your previous region and take up some kind of new business in Jerusalem.

ii. To live in Jerusalem, you had to re-arrange your social priorities, certainly leaving some friends and family behind in your old village.

iii. To live in Jerusalem, you had to have a mind to endure the problems in the city. It had been a ghost town for 70 years, and was now basically a slightly rebuilt, somewhat repopulated ghost town. The city didn't look all that glorious and it needed work.

iv. To live in Jerusalem, you had to live knowing you were a target for the enemy.

There were strong walls to protect you, but since Jerusalem was now a notable city with rebuilt walls, the fear was more from whole armies than bands of robbers. The old village was nice, but not in much danger from great armies.

v. The Bible tells us there is a city coming down from heaven to earth, when God is done with this earth as we know it, and it calls that city *New Jerusalem* (Rev. 21:2).

People don't want to be citizens of the New Jerusalem for the same reasons many didn't want to be citizens of Nehemiah's Jerusalem.

B. Roster of those living in Jerusalem and in Judea.

1. (3-24) Leaders who lived in Jerusalem.

These *are* the heads of the province who dwelt in Jerusalem. (But in the cities of Judah everyone dwelt in his own possession in their cities; Israelites, priests, Levites, Nethinim, and descendants of Solomon's servants.) Also in Jerusalem dwelt *some* of the children of Judah and of the children of Benjamin. The children of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the children of Perez; and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. All the sons of Perez who dwelt at Jerusalem *were* four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men. And these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah; and after him Gabbai *and* Sallai, nine hundred and twenty-eight. Joel the son of Zichri *was* their overseer, and Judah the son of Senuah *was* second over the city. Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, and Jachin; Seraiah the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, *was* the leader of the house of God. Their brethren who did the work of the house *were* eight hundred and twenty-two; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, and his brethren, heads of the fathers'

houses, were two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, and their brethren, mighty men of valor, *were* one hundred and twenty-eight. Their overseer *was* Zabdiel the son of *one of* the great men. Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the heads of the Levites, *had* the oversight of the business

outside of the house of God; Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the leader *who* began the thanksgiving with prayer; Bakbukiah, the second among his brethren; and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. All the Levites in the holy city *were* two hundred and eighty-four. Moreover the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren who kept the gates, *were* one hundred and seventy-two. And the rest of Israel, of the priests *and* Levites, *were* in all the cities of Judah, everyone in his inheritance. But the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel. And Ziha and Gishpa *were* over the Nethinim. Also the overseer of the Levites at Jerusalem *was* Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha, of the sons of Asaph, the singers in charge of the service of the house of God. For *it was* the king's command concerning them that a certain portion should be for the singers, a quota day by day. Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, *was* the king's deputy in all matters concerning the people.

a. **These are the heads of the province:** This extensive list includes tribal leaders (of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), military men, priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and civil and royal servants.

b. **Who dwelt in Jerusalem:** All these notable men and their families took the lead by choosing to settle in Jerusalem, setting a good example for all God's people.

2. (25-36) Jewish villages and towns throughout Judea.

And as for the villages with their fields, *some* of the children of Judah dwelt in Kirjath Arba and its villages, Dibon and its villages, Jekabzeel and its villages; in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet, Hazar Shual, and Beersheba and its villages; in Ziklag and Meconah and its villages; in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages; in Lachish and its fields; in Azekah and its villages. They dwelt from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom. Also the children of

Benjamin from Geba *dwelt* in Michmash, Aiija, and Bethel, and their villages; in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah; in Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim; in Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat; in Lod, Ono, *and* the Valley of Craftsmen. Some of the Judean divisions of Levites *were* in Benjamin.

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2 The people gave their blessing on all the men who volunteered to settle in Jerusalem.

3 These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem. (While other Israelites, the priests, the Levites, the temple attendants, and the sons of the servants of Solomon settled in the cities of Judah, each on his own property in their cities, **4** some of the descendants of Judah and some of the descendants of Benjamin settled in Jerusalem.) Of the descendants of Judah:

Athaiah son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, from the descendants of Perez; **5** and Maaseiah son of Baruch, the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, from the descendants of Shelah. **6** The sum total of the descendants of Perez who were settling in Jerusalem was 468 exceptional men.

7 These are the descendants of Benjamin: Sallu son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah, **8** and his followers, Gabbai and Sallai – 928 in all. **9** Joel son of Zicri was the officer in charge of them, and Judah son of Hassenuah was second-in-command over the city.

10 From the priests:

Jedaiah son of Joiarib, Jakin, **11** Seraiah son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, supervisor in the temple of God, **12** and their colleagues who were carrying out work for the temple – 822;

and Adaiah son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah, **13** and his colleagues who were heads of families – 242; and Amashsai son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, **14** and his colleagues who were exceptional men – 128. The officer over them was Zabdiel the son of Haggedolim.

15 From the Levites:

Shemaiah son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; **16** Shabbethai and Jozabad, leaders of the Levites, were in charge of the external work for the temple of God; **17** Mattaniah son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the praise leader who led in thanksgiving and prayer; Bakbukiah, second among his colleagues; and Abda son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. **18** The sum total of the Levites in the holy city was 284.

19 And the gatekeepers:

Akkub, Talmon and their colleagues who were guarding the gates – 172.

20 And the rest of the Israelites, with the priests and the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, each on his own property.

21 The temple attendants were living on Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were over them.

22 The overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica. He was one of Asaph's descendants who were the singers responsible for the service of the temple of God. **23** For they were under royal orders which determined their activity day by day.

24 Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, one of the descendants of Zerah son of Judah, was an adviser to the king in every matter pertaining to the people.

25 As for the settlements with their fields, some of the people of Judah settled in Kiriath Arba and its neighboring

villages, in Dibon and its villages, in Jekabzeel and its settlements, **26** in Jeshua, in Moladah, in Beth Pelet, **27** in Hazar Shual, in Beer Sheba and its villages, **28** in Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages, **29** in En Rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth, **30** Zanoah, Adullam and their settlements, in Lachish and its fields, and in Azekah and its villages. So they were encamped from Beer Sheba to the Valley of Hinnom.

31 Some of the descendants of Benjamin settled in Geba, Micmash, Aija, Bethel and its villages, **32** in Anathoth, Nob, and Ananiah, **33** in Hazor, Ramah, and Gittaim, **34** in Hadid, Zeboim, and Neballat, **35** in Lod, Ono, and the Valley of the Craftsmen. **36** Some of the Judean divisions of the Levites settled in Benjamin.

1 These are the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Guzik - Nehemiah 12:1-47

Nehemiah 12 - Dedication of the Wall

A. Priestly and Levitical families.

1. (1-11) Priests and Levites in the days of Zerubbabel, the high priest.

Now these *are* the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, *and* Jedaiah. These *were* the heads of the priests and their brethren in the days of Jeshua. Moreover the Levites *were* Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, *and* Mattaniah *who led* the thanksgiving *psalms*, he and his brethren. Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, *stood* across from them in *their* duties.

Jeshua begot Joiakim, Joiakim begot Eliashib, Eliashib begot Joiada, Joiada begot Jonathan, and Jonathan begot Jaddua.

2. (12-21) Priests in the days of Joiakim.

Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, the heads of the fathers' *houses were*: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah,

Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; of Melichu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; of Abijah, Zichri; *the son* of Minjamin; of Moadiah, Piltai; of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; *and* of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

3. (22-26) Levites during the reign of Darius the Persian.

During the reign of Darius the Persian, a record *was also kept* of the Levites and priests *who had been* heads of their fathers' *houses* in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua. The sons of Levi, the heads of the fathers' *houses* until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib, *were* written in the book of the chronicles. And the heads of the Levites *were* Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers across from them, to praise *and* give thanks, group alternating with group, according to the command of David the man of God. Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub *were* gatekeepers keeping the watch at the storerooms of the gates. These *lived* in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

B. The dedication ceremony.

1. (27-29) Gathering the Levites for the dedication ceremony.

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, *with* cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem, from the villages of the

Netophathites, from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built themselves

villages all around Jerusalem.

a. **The sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem:** The Levites had many responsibilities in the life and worship of Israel, but one of the most important jobs they had was to lead the people in songs of worship and praise to God.

b. **To celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing:** Mostly, they did not sing without musical instruments. Here are specifically mentioned **cymbals and stringed instruments and harps.**

i. There are at least twenty-two different musical instruments mentioned in the Bible, including the harp, the lyre (an ancient guitar), horns, trumpets, flutes, tambourines, drums, cymbals, and bells.

ii. The Levites were specially appointed to use these instruments to lead the people in worshipping God through singing.

c. **Sons of the singers . . . the singers had built themselves villages:** There were also specially appointed singers. The singers in Nehemiah's day had a close-knit bond, both by families and living arrangements.

i. Since the job of these singers was to lead the people in worship of God, they had to be good singers; but more importantly, they had to be people of worship themselves.

ii. There is a huge difference between being a great singer and being a great leader of songs of worship to God. Worship should be excellent, but it isn't entertainment. The goal isn't to give the people a good feeling (though that may happen), but to give glory and honor to God.

2. (30) Purification.

Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

a. Then the priests and Levites purified themselves:

They did this *first*. They could not effectively lead the people in worship of God unless they walked in purity before the Lord.

b. And purified the people: The next did this.

They brought cleansing to the people the way the Bible said to, knowing that only a purified people could really worship and praise God.

i. Some might silently object here; they may say, "I know a person who goes to church and seems to be lost in beautiful praise and worship to God, and I also know their life is rather impure outside the church walls. It sure seems they are worshipping God, but are personally impure."

ii. Something is wrong there; probably, their worship is not a true worship of God in spirit and in truth, but instead a "soulish"

experience. All that inwardly moves a person in a deep way is not necessarily of the spirit; it can be of the soul. One of the great works of the Word of God is to divide between that which is truly spiritual and that which is merely soulish (Heb. 4:12).

iii. Without purity, we can't worship God in spirit and in truth, as Jesus commanded us to (Joh. 4:24). Psa. 24:3-4 asks, *Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart*, and it means it in the sense of bringing praise to God.

iv. We can be made pure and clean before God today, right now, by doing what the Bible says to do - not in following an Old Testament ceremony, but by receiving the word of the New Testament: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from*

all unrighteousness. (1Jo. 1:9)

c. **The gates, and the wall:** Third, their surroundings were purified. Purified surrounding help us to walk in purity consistently. The homes and offices of many Christians could use a good purification and cleansing.

3. (31-43) Two choirs lead Jerusalem in joyful praise.

So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. *One* went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate. After them went Hoshai and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, and some of the priests' sons with trumpets; Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, and his brethren, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, *and* Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God.

Ezra the scribe *went* before them. By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of David, on the stairway of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward. The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite *way*, and I *was* behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison. So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me; and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Minjamin, Michaiah, Elioenai,

Zechariah, *and* Hananiah, with trumpets; also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and

the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

a. Appointed two large thanksgiving

choirs: The two large choirs were called **thanksgiving choirs** for good reason. All praise and worship must have a strong element of thanksgiving to God for it to be genuine.

i. Notice that the singers sang loudly.

They had to be heard, because as glorious as the instruments were, the people would follow the lead of the singers in worship.

b. God made them rejoice with great joy: God did this with the choirs assembled, and the people spread all about. They were then overwhelmed with joy and thanksgiving, considering all God had done.

c. The women and the children also

rejoiced: This tremendous experience of worship was for everyone. There weren't some who weren't able to worship.

d. The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off: Their worship was a testimony to others, and what others heard was not so much the singing itself as the *joy*. We often worry about others hearing us sing; but what God wants to hear and what others should hear is not so much your singing, but your *joy*.

3. (44-47) Other aspects of this day of joy.

And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered. Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification, according to the command of David *and* Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old *there were* chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, a portion for

each day. They also consecrated *holy things* for the Levites, and the Levites consecrated *them* for the children of Aaron.

a. **Some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings:** This was a day of *giving*. People brought their **offerings, firstfruits, tithes** to the storehouse of the Levites, and they did it with joy because they enjoyed supporting the priests and Levites ministering on their behalf.

b. **Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification:** This was a day of *purity*. It was an ongoing concern, not a one-time ceremony.

c. **They also consecrated holy things for the Levites:** It was a day of *consecration*. Holy things were set apart for the Levites, speaking of the separation unto God.

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2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, **3** Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, **4** Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah, **5** Mijamin, Moadiah, Bilgah, **6** Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, **7** Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, and Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and their colleagues in the days of Jeshua.

8 And the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who together with his colleagues was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. **9** Bakbukiah and Unni, their colleagues, stood opposite them in the services.

10 Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim was the father of Eliashib, Eliashib was the father of Joiada, **11**

Joiada was the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

12 In the days of Joiakim, these were the priests who were leaders of the families: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; **13** of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; **14** of Malluch, Jonathan; of Shecaniah, Joseph; **15** of Harim, Adna; of Meremoth, Helkai; **16** of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; **17** of Abijah, Zicri; of Miniamin and

of Moadiah, Piltai; **18** of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; **19** of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; **20** of Sallu, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; **21** of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

22 As for the Levites, in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua the heads of families were recorded, as were the priests during the reign of Darius the Persian.

23 The descendants of Levi were recorded in the Book of the Chronicles as heads of families up to the days of Johanan son of Eliashib. **24** And the leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua son of Kadmiel, and their colleagues, who stood opposite them to offer praise and thanks, one contingent corresponding to the other, as specified by David the man of God.

25 Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers who were guarding the storerooms at the gates. **26** These all served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priestly scribe.

27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought out the Levites from all the places they lived to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication joyfully with songs of thanksgiving and songs accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres. **28** The singers were also assembled from the district around Jerusalem and from the settlements of the Netophathites **29** and from Beth Gilgal and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built settlements for themselves around Jerusalem. **30** When the priests and Levites had purified themselves, they purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

31 I brought the leaders of Judah up on top of the wall, and I appointed two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on the top of the wall southward toward the Dung Gate. **32** Going after them were Hoshaiah, half the leaders of Judah, **33** Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, **34** Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, **35** some of the priests with trumpets,

Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, **36** and his colleagues – Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani – with musical instruments of David the man of God. (Ezra the scribe led them.) **37** They went over the Fountain Gate and continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall. They passed the house of David and continued on to the Water Gate toward the east.

38 The second choir was proceeding in the opposite direction. I followed them, along with half the people, on top of the wall, past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, **39** over the Ephraim Gate, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate. They stopped at the Gate of the Guard.

40 Then the two choirs that gave thanks took their stations in the temple of God. I did also, along with half the officials with me, **41** and the priests – Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with their trumpets – **42** and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer. The choirs sang loudly under the direction of Jezrahiah. **43** And on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced, for God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard from far away.

44 On that day men were appointed over the storerooms for the contributions, first fruits, and tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions prescribed by the law for the priests and the Levites, for the people of Judah took delight in the priests and Levites who were ministering.

45 They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, along with the singers and gatekeepers, according to the commandment of David and his son Solomon. **46** For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanks to God. **47**

So in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah, all Israel was contributing the portions for the singers and gatekeepers, according to the daily need. They also set aside the portion for the Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron.

1 On that day the book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people. They found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite may ever enter the assembly of God, Guzik - Nehemiah 13:1-31

Nehemiah 13 - Nehemiah's Reforms

A. True worship leads to the nation's obedience.

1. (1-2) Hearing the law brings a call to obedience.

On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.

a. **No Ammonite or Moabite should ever**

come into the assembly of God: As the people drew near to God in worship (as seen in Nehemiah 11 and 12), they became aware of God's standards. In this case the standard stated in Deu. 23:3-4, where the Ammonites and Moabites were not to be regarded as part of Israel.

b. **Because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water:** The Ammonites and Moabites were singled out

because of their devious schemes against Israel, when Israel came into the promised land - at least a thousand years before this.

i. Long before the Ammonites and Moabites had schemed against Israel, God had made a promise to the father of the Jewish people, Abraham: *I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you* (Gen.

12:3). The command about the Ammonites

and the Moabites is a simple fulfillment of this promise.

c. **Should ever come into the assembly of God:** This meant to be regarded as one of the people of Israel and people of God. It meant one could fully participate in the spiritual life of Israel.

i. An Israelite became a part of God's covenant by birth; but an Ammonite or Moabite could not. They had to become a part of the covenant by choice - by joining with God's covenant people and leaving their own people.

ii. This command was a powerful message - both then and now. It said to these

Ammonites and Moabites, "You are not a part of the people of God by birth. You must make a choice. You can not live the thinking and deeds of your anti-God culture, and truly join in the spiritual life of God's people.

Unless you leave one and join the other, you will never really be a part of this spiritual life. Come join us!"

d. **However, our God turned the curse into a blessing:**

This refers to the events of Numbers 22-24, where God blessed Israel, even though the prophet Balaam wanted to curse them. It also reminds us that God is able - more than able - to turn any curse into a blessing.

2. (3) After hearing God's command, Israel obeys and separates from the mixed multitude.

So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel.

a. **They separated all the mixed multitude from Israel:** They could have thought of 20

reasons to not do what the word of God plainly told them to do. Instead, they simply obeyed.

i. They might have made familiar excuses:

- "That command was made long ago, and speaks to a different time."

- "Things are different now."

- "Let's not go overboard."

· "Let's assign a task force to examine the issue."

b. **The mixed multitude**: This refers to those who wanted to associate with the people of Israel, but did not want to count the cost and make a full commitment.

i. Even today, there may be people of good will in churches; honorable people, who respect God and His word. Yet they are part of **the mixed multitude** because they have not received God's covenant of salvation in Jesus. Such people are welcome, but it should be understood where they stand.

B. Nehemiah's reforms.

1. (4-9) Temple reforms.

Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, *was* allied with Tobiah. And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded *to be given* to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I

brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

a. **But during all this I was not in**

Jerusalem: This section indicates that Nehemiah left Jerusalem and went back to his duties in the Persian court. He was gone from Jerusalem for anywhere from 10 to 12 years.

i. Nehemiah left sometime after the remarkable spiritual revival noted in the recent chapters. But the real test of revival - the real test of God's work in our lives - is the long term. It is seeing where we are with the Lord ten years after a season of great work.

b. **I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah:** When Nehemiah came back, he saw that **Eliashib the priest** had entered into agreements with one of the enemies of Nehemiah's work of rebuilding the wall - **Tobiah**.

i. Incidentally, **Tobiah** was an Ammonite (Neh. 2:10) - one of the very mixed multitude that had been put out of the assembly of God's people some 10 years before. At this point in the record of Nehemiah, **Tobiah** was not only *present* among the assembly, he actually rented rooms in the temple courts.

ii. Apparently, Tobiah had not changed over the years. He did not join the people of God in the terms of His covenant. The problem was evident to Nehemiah - but **Eliashib** was completely blind to it.

c. **And it grieved me bitterly:** There were many reasons why this was so distressing to Nehemiah.

i. Because rooms in the courts of the temple of God were being occupied by a man not only a pagan, but who also had a history of actively opposing God's work in the days of Nehemiah.

ii. Because it reflected so badly on Eliashib (a man who was a spiritual leader in Israel) and those around him. It showed

that if Eliashib was blind to a problem area, there was also no one around him who could confront him with the problem.

iii. Because it made Nehemiah question the lasting value of the spiritual revival he witnessed when last in Jerusalem.

d. Therefore I threw all the household

goods of Tobiah out of the room: Nehemiah wasn't one just to sit back and grieve. He took action - throwing all Tobiah's stuff out of the rooms he occupied in the temple courts, then ceremonially cleansing the rooms, and finally by putting the rooms to their proper use - as storerooms for the sacred things of the temple.

i. Nehemiah is much like Jesus when He cleansed the temple from those who profaned it. Both Jesus and Nehemiah had the wisdom to not confuse love with being "nice" - and the wisdom to know when to take bold action.

2. (10-14) Financial reforms.

I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given *them*; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them *was* Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task *was* to distribute to their brethren.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!

a. I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them: The people did not obey God's word

regarding giving. Because of the lack of support, those who should give their time to the service of God and His people (**the Levites and the singers**) could not - and they had to leave that service.

b. **Why is the house of God forsaken?** The lack of giving was a way of forsaking the house of God.

c. **I gathered them all together and set them in their place:** Nehemiah set the situation right by expecting the Levites and the singers to recommit to the work of serving God and His people as they should. He also reorganized the collection and accounting of the people's tithes and gifts.

3. (15-22) Priority reform.

In those days I saw *people* in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all *kinds of* burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned *them* about the day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold *them* on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing *is* this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted *some* of my servants at the gates, *so that* no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. Then I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do *so* again, I will lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no *more* on the Sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should

cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day.

Remember me, O my God, *concerning* this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!

a. In those days I saw people in Judah

treading wine presses on the Sabbath: The Sabbath was being ignored in disobedience to God's clear command under the Old Covenant.

Foreigners sold and the people of Israel bought.

i. At the root, this was a problem of priorities. There is nothing wrong with buying and selling, only when our desire to buy and sell, to make money or spend

money, becomes more important to us than honoring God. This was a clear way the people of Israel were putting making and spending money before glorifying God.

ii. The New Testament makes it clear we are not under the law of the Sabbath in the

same sense Israel was under the Old

Covenant (Col. 2:16-17); but we are

certainly under the same obligation to make honoring God more important than making money or spending money.

b. You bring added wrath on Israel by

profaning the Sabbath: Nehemiah knew that sin was not only a personal issue. When such open sin is winked at and left uncorrected among God's people, it invites the correcting hand of God.

i. Nehemiah wasn't going to sit still for this; he threatened **If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!** He did not mean the gentle laying on of hands for prayer, but the rough laying on of hands for correction.

4. (23-31a) Relationship reform.

In those days I also saw Jews *who* had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, *and* Moab. And half of their children spoke

the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying*,

"You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel.

Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?" And *one* of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, *was* a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, and *to bringing* the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times.

a. In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and

Moab: In the years Nehemiah was away the Israelites had resumed their practice of intermarrying with the pagan nations surrounding them. This was in dramatic disobedience to God's command.

b. So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear: From this strong reaction of Nehemiah, we gather he considered this to be the most dangerous of their sins - pursuing ungodly romance, and getting involved in romantic relationships God had said "no" to.

i. His example of Solomon is well taken (**Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? . . . pagan women caused even**

him to sin). If Solomon, one of the wisest and most blessed men ever, sinned with unwise and ungodly romance then no one else should consider themselves invulnerable.

5. (31b) Conclusion: Nehemiah's clear conscience.

Remember me, O my God, for good!

a. **Remember me:** At the end of it all, Nehemiah knew he did his best to make the people of God strong, safe, and secure. Beyond that, he also led them to be pure, worshipful, and obedient.

b. **Remember me, O my God, for good!** Yet, Nehemiah certainly carried a sense of failure.

In Nehemiah 10 the people made a solemn covenant to God that they would not do three things: have ungodly romantic relationships (10:30), buy and sell on the Sabbath (10:31), and support the work of God with money as He commanded (10:32-39).

i. Nevertheless, in Nehemiah 13, some 10 to 12 years later, Israel was steeped in the exact sins they vowed to stop. Nehemiah had to address the problems of ungodly romantic relationships (13:23-31), buying and selling on the Sabbath (13:15-22), and failing to support the work of God as He commanded (13:10-14).

ii. In Neh. 10:39 the people promised: *we will not neglect the house of our God*. But later in Neh. 13:11, Nehemiah had to ask: *Why is the house of God forsaken?* It was forsaken because Israel did not keep its promises before God.

iii. This makes a point vividly clear: the law - that is, rules, vows, promises, covenants,

and the such, are all ultimately powerless to stop sin. Only the grace of God, alive and flowing in our lives, can give us the power to truly overcome sin.

iv. Paul expresses this in Rom. 8:3, among other places: *For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.* Too many Christians look for victory in the making of rules, of vows, of promises - and fail to find it, because all those things tend to make us look to ourselves, instead of looking to Jesus.

v. The Old Testament history of Israel, from beginning to end, illustrates this. When the nation was first born at the Exodus, despite the most spectacular miracles, displays of God's glory, and revelation of the law, the people sinned, by crediting a gold calf with their deliverance from Egypt! And now here, at the end of the Old Testament history of God's people in the promised land, Nehemiah is pulling hair out - his own and those of sinners - because they couldn't keep their promises to God.

vi. If we could be saved by our own promises, by our own commitment to Jesus, then His death would have been noble, but unnecessary. We aren't saved by some vow we make, or some leaf we turn over, but by trusting in who Jesus is, and what He has done to save us.

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2 for they had not met the Israelites with food and water, but instead had hired Balaam to curse them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into blessing.) **3** When they heard the law, they removed from Israel all who were of mixed ancestry.

4 But prior to this time, Eliashib the priest, a relative of Tobiah, had been appointed over the storerooms of the temple of our God. **5** He made for himself a large storeroom where previously they had been keeping the grain offering, the incense, and the vessels, along with the tithes of the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil as commanded for the Levites, the singers, the gate keepers, and the offering for the priests.

6 During all this time I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes of Babylon, I had gone back to the king. After some time I had requested leave of the king, **7** and I returned to Jerusalem. Then I discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah by supplying him with a storeroom in the courts of the temple of God. **8** I was very upset, and I threw all of Tobiah's household possessions out of the storeroom. **9** Then I gave instructions that the storerooms should be purified, and I brought back the equipment of the temple of God, along with the grain offering and the incense.

10 I also discovered that the grain offerings for the Levites had not been provided, and that as a result the Levites and the singers who performed this work had all gone off to their fields. **11** So I registered a complaint with the leaders, asking "Why is the temple of God neglected?"

Then I gathered them and reassigned them to their positions.

12 Then all of Judah brought the tithe of the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil to the storerooms. **13** I gave instructions that Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a certain Levite named Pedaiah be put in charge of the storerooms, and that Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, be their assistant, for they were regarded as trustworthy. It was then their responsibility to oversee the distribution to their colleagues.

14 Please remember me for this, O my God, and do not wipe out the kindness that I have done for the temple of my God

and for its services!

15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath, bringing in heaps of grain and loading them onto donkeys, along with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, and bringing them to Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I warned them on the day that they sold these provisions.

16 The people from Tyre who lived there were bringing fish and all kinds of merchandise and were selling it on the Sabbath to the people of Judah – and in Jerusalem, of all places! **17** So I registered a complaint with the nobles of Judah, saying to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? **18** Isn’t this the way your ancestors acted, causing our God to bring on them and on this city all this misfortune? And now you are causing even more wrath on Israel, profaning the Sabbath like this!”

19 When the evening shadows began to fall on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be closed. I further directed that they were not to be opened until after the Sabbath. I positioned some of my young men at the gates so that no load could enter on the Sabbath day.

20 The traders and sellers of all kinds of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem once or twice. **21** But I warned them and said, “Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you repeat this, I will forcibly remove you!” From that time on they did not show up on the Sabbath. **22** Then I directed the Levites to purify themselves and come and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

For this please remember me, O my God, and have pity on me in keeping with your great love.

23 Also in those days I saw the men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. **24** Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod (or the language of one of the other peoples mentioned) and were unable to speak the language of Judah. **25** So I entered a complaint with them. I called down a curse on them, and I struck some of the men and pulled out their hair. I had them

swear by God saying, “You will not marry off your daughters to their sons, and you will not take any of their daughters as wives for your sons or for yourselves! **26**

Was it not because of things like these that King Solomon of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. But the foreign wives made even him sin! **27** Should we then in your case hear that you do all this great evil, thereby being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign wives?”

28 Now one of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. So I banished him from my sight.

29 Please remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priesthood, and the Levites.

30 So I purified them of everything foreign, and I assigned specific duties to the priests and the Levites. **31** I also provided for the wood offering at the appointed times and also for the first fruits.

Please remember me for good, O my God.